

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**Liminal Entities: Transition and the 'Space Between' in the Short  
Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May  
Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf**

**being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**In the University of Hull**

**by**

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**September 2006**

# **Summary of Thesis submitted for PhD degree**

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**on**

## **Liminal Entities: Transition and the ‘Space Between’ in the Short Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf**

The relationship between literary Modernism and the short story is a neglected area, particularly in terms of women’s writing. Traditionally, critical interest in Virginia Woolf’s novels and essays has tended to eclipse her short fiction, whilst the stories of Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair are virtually absent from serious critical discussion. Only Katherine Mansfield has received due attention, though rarely in relation to her women contemporaries.

Since the early 1990s, however, there has been a renaissance of interest in the Modernist short story. This draws attention to a recurring preoccupation in the genre: that of transgressing boundaries. A connection between the short story and liminality (deriving from the Latin word *limen* meaning boundary or threshold) has, however, rarely been explicitly made in literary criticism. This thesis redresses this critical neglect, exploring the literary, contextual and theoretical implications of the Modernist fascination with liminality through the experimental genre of the short story.

Liminality is ambiguous and paradoxical, encapsulating a simultaneous capacity for liberation and restriction. This paradox forms the central focus of attention in this thesis, which explores how Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf use liminality to explore the shifting, fragmented identity of the Modernist subject. My chapters examine various liminal entities - the pilgrimage, war, the inner life, the ‘moment of being’, mysticism, mortality and immortality – relating to the form, context or content of the Modernist short story. This discussion ultimately demonstrates that it is through the intrinsically liminal genre of the short story, more than any other form, that these four writers use the liminal trope to discard their Victorian heritage through experimental writing styles which offer a unique contribution to the development of literary Modernism.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the English Department at the University Hull, in particular Ruth Hawden and Professor Valerie Sanders for their kind support throughout the course of my research, and my academic supervisor, Dr Jane Thomas, for her invaluable input and encouragement and for sustaining my motivation.

I also wish to thank staff at the archives of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, and the University of Reading for allowing me to consult original letters and manuscripts. Unpublished material from letters between May Sinclair and Henry Gwatkin is quoted with permission from the Masters and Fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

Grateful acknowledgement is also due to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for providing the scholarship which funded this study.

My love and appreciation finally belongs to my friends and family, in particular my aunt, Jean Beagle (1936-2001), mother Jacqueline Drewery (1947-2002) and grandmother Doris Arksey (1919-2003).

*'For we think back through our mothers if we are women ...'* This thesis is dedicated to their loving memory.

## Abbreviations

### Mansfield

<i>CLKM</i>	<i>Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield (4 vols)</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Collected Stories</i>
<i>GP</i>	<i>The Garden Party and Other Stories</i>
<i>JKM</i>	<i>Journal of Katherine Mansfield</i>
<i>LKM</i>	<i>Letters of Katherine Mansfield (2 vols)</i>

### Richardson

<i>JP</i>	<i>Journey to Paradise</i>
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### Sinclair

<i>TTBS</i>	<i>Tales Told by Simpson</i>
<i>US</i>	<i>Uncanny Stories</i>

### Woolf

<i>AROO</i>	<i>A Room of One's Own</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Diary (5 vols)</i>
<i>HH</i>	<i>A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction</i>
<i>L</i>	<i>Letters (5 vols)</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>Moments of Being</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>
<i>TG</i>	<i>Three Guineas</i>
<i>TTL</i>	<i>To the Lighthouse</i>
<i>TW</i>	<i>The Waves</i>
<i>WD</i>	<i>A Writer's Diary</i>

All quotations have been changed to standard British spelling throughout.



## Introduction

### In-Between Spaces

‘...the white spaces that lie between hour and hour [...] were my life’  
(Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* 156).

Ostensibly there is no such state, place or time as a ‘space between’ hour and hour. The passing of time between hours, days and seasons is an apparently seamless transition; the dividing moment is impalpable, transient and ephemeral. It is a moment signifying change from one place or state to another; a fleeting, temporary sense of being that renders all who experience it temporarily ‘outside’ the strictures of social convention and the norms of measured space and time. Yet Woolf’s quotation poses a paradox. Whilst apparently intangible, the space between is habitable, constituting the speaker’s life. This space, or ‘transition between’, as Arnold Van Gennep has described it, is definable as a liminal entity: a phenomenon that is elusive and untouchable, and yet exists as a palpable place or state of being. Coined by anthropologists and adopted increasingly in literary criticism, the term ‘liminal’ originates from the Latin *limen*, meaning ‘boundary’ or ‘threshold’.<sup>1</sup>

Liminal entities are ambiguous and paradoxical. For Victor Turner, liminality is a social ‘limbo’ with none of the attributes of the preceding or subsequent social or cultural states (*Ritual* 24). Angela Smith also points out that ‘the root of “liminal” recurs in the word “limbo”, from *limbus* in Latin, meaning edge or border’ (10). However, whilst the two terms *limen* and *margin* overlap subtly in various ways, they are not interchangeable. Marginality is a condition of being peripheral or ‘minor’, a category in which, as Turner puts it, ‘individuals (marginals)’ may become critics ‘from the perspective of communitas’ (*Pilgrimage* 251). However, Turner and Van Gennep specifically

define liminality as a 'transition between', encompassing a state which, according to Turner, is 'no longer the positive past condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition' (*Ritual* 41). Liminality is thus potentially liberating, as meaning in culture tends to be generated in the interfaces between established cultural subsystems (ibid). The crossing and interrogating of borders enables a confrontation with otherness, potentially enabling a challenge to traditional assumptions about political, cultural and personal identity. However, the 'space between' also embodies less positive characteristics. Associated with death, incoherence, silence, madness and alienation, liminality entails the inevitable negative consequences of occupying an 'outsider' status. As well as being a liberating state, liminality also entails what Turner calls 'the breakdown without compensatory replacement of normative well-defined social ties and bonds' (ibid 46).<sup>2</sup>

This thesis maintains that the restrictive yet liberating paradox inherent in the liminal is a pervasive feature of literary Modernism, particularly in the short story. Emerging at the turn of the twentieth century and embodying characteristics of an aesthetic which strove, in Ezra Pound's maxim, to 'make it new', Modernism is transitional in both content and context.<sup>3</sup> The threshold states on which the short stories I discuss typically focus may be literal or physical, but are also frequently psychological, chaotic and unstable. Elusive yet habitable, the 'space between' simultaneously embraces the states of inclusion and exclusion. Liminality is everywhere and nowhere. It is subversive, yet also potentially restrictive.

I am indebted in my analysis to the work of Angela Smith, whose biographical study of the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf points to their sustained fascination with in-between spaces. According to Smith, the work of both writers reveals a constant questioning of limits to social behaviour and fictional modes. Their fiction reveals an intimate knowledge of

being suspended, inhabiting areas Smith identifies as in-between places, states of liminality or crossing places 'from one point of being to another' (Smith 7). Subsequent critics have also increasingly drawn parallels between the short story and liminality, particularly in the work of Woolf and Mansfield. For instance, Kathryn Benzel and Ruth Hoberman's 2004 study, significantly entitled *Trespassing Boundaries*, explores the way in which Woolf's short stories defy boundaries between reader and text, among readers, and between 'kinds' of texts (1).<sup>4</sup> Liminality is also a feature of critical work on Mansfield's stories, including Angela Smith's 1997 article 'Thresholds in 'Prelude' and *To the Lighthouse*', and William Atkinson's 'Mrs Sheridan's Masterstroke: Liminality in Katherine Mansfield's Representations of Places' (2006). Christine Darrohn's essay 'Blown to Bits!' (1998) relates 'The Garden Party' to the context of war which, as I argue in Chapter 3, is itself a liminal experience.

As Smith argues, and subsequent critical commentary confirms, Mansfield and Woolf were significantly concerned with in-between spaces. The liminal content and context of literary Modernism in general thus suggests the possibility of a wider engagement between this theme and the Modernist short story. Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair, whilst having considerably less critical attention devoted to their work than either Mansfield or Woolf, both published short stories throughout their writing careers. Their stories, like those of Mansfield and Woolf, are also preoccupied with liminality. Gloria Fromm observes, for instance, that Richardson 'liked to imagine secret reservations, concealed inner lives, or undisclosed judgements' in her short stories (Fromm 338). Trudi Tate also notes a tendency in Richardson's short fiction to transgress boundaries: her stories are typically very short and 'show a strong resistance to obvious or fixed meanings' (Tate xxiv). Most of her stories are also 'uncertainly ended, opening out, inviting speculation and interpretation' (ibid).<sup>5</sup>



Likewise, Sinclair produced numerous short stories throughout her career relating to such liminal states as the uncanny, the journey, and death. Her work also reveals a fascination with war and psychological borderlands.<sup>6</sup> Richardson and Sinclair arguably also found the 'sense of freedom' in their short story-writing referred to by Woolf in her essay on 'The Russian Point of View' (225). Richardson, for instance, suggested there were "'shorts" she felt she had to write rather than going on with *Pilgrimage*. "They attract me", she said' (Fromm, 342). Likewise, Sinclair wrote of the enjoyment she found in the genre in a 1910 letter in which she spoke of 'writing short stories - stories of all queer lengths & all queer subjects; "spooky" ones, some of them. I like doing them!' (qtd Raitt 115).

Until recently, Katherine Mansfield was the only writer of the four who received due critical recognition for her short stories. This is unusual for a writer who concentrated almost solely on this particular form. However, with the exception of Woolf, the critical commentary devoted to Mansfield has rarely been in relation to her female contemporaries. The complexity and rivalry characterising the relationship between Mansfield and Woolf has generated critical interest in the form of two book-length studies, Nóra Séllei's *A Personal and Professional Bond*, and Angela Smith's aforementioned *A Public of Two* (1999). Biographies of the two writers, Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf* and Claire Tomalin's *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, both contain chapters detailing the relationship between them.

Woolf's short fiction has until recently received less critical attention than Mansfield's. A major canonical twentieth-century novelist and essayist, Woolf's status in these areas has eclipsed her short fiction, despite the fact that it constitutes a significant body of her work. Commentary on Woolf's stories and sketches has traditionally been sparse, amounting to some short articles, the introductions to her published short-story volumes, and Dean Baldwin's *Virginia*

*Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1989).<sup>7</sup> The short story is also conspicuous by its absence from the *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000). By 2003, when a series of sketches was resurrected from a private collection of papers and published as *Carlyle's House and Other Sketches*, some of Woolf's stories still languished unpublished in the Sussex University archives. Criticism on Woolf's short stories has since gathered pace, however. Two book-length discussions followed shortly after the publication of *Carlyle's House*: Nena Skrbic's *Wild Outbursts of Freedom* and Kathryn Benzel's and Ruth Hoberman's edited collection of essays, *Trespassing Boundaries*, both of which appeared in 2004.

Richardson and Sinclair have suffered a more notable critical neglect. May Sinclair was a prolific and popular fictional writer and literary critic of her time, yet in the first decade of the twenty-first century most of her fiction was out of print. The criticism that does exist, with the exception of reviews by contemporary critics at the time of publication, tends to focus on her later novels.<sup>8</sup> However, Sinclair produced no fewer than six volumes of short stories, many of which are experimental, cryptic, and characteristically Modernist. None of these had been recently reprinted until the reappearance in May 2006 of *Uncanny Stories*, published by Wordsworth Editions with the added inclusion of Sinclair's 1911 ghost story 'The Intercessor'.<sup>9</sup> Little criticism exists on Sinclair's stories, although there are illuminating discussions in Suzanne Raitt's 2000 biography *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian*, Sandra Kemp's article 'But how describe a world seen without a self?' and Rebeccah Kinnamon Neff's work on *Uncanny Stories* and Sinclair's likely influence on T S Eliot.<sup>10</sup>

Dorothy Richardson's short fiction was also marginalised in comparison to her fourteen-volume novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*, which has received fairly widespread critical attention. The Virago Press published Richardson's stories together for the first time in 1989, but the volume has since gone out of print and



commentary on this neglected area of her work has been infrequent.<sup>11</sup> Richardson further produced a fairly lengthy series of sketches for the *Saturday Review*, some of which are discussed in the following chapters and which constitute a fascinating body of work in themselves. The sparse criticism on Richardson's short stories includes Sandra Kemp's essay as well as Howard Finn's 'At the Margins of Modernism' and Susan Jones's 'Conrad on the Borderlands of Modernism'. All contain commentary on Richardson's stories and significantly, these articles again relate strongly to liminal themes. The margins and boundaries referred to by Finn and Jones are recognisable liminal entities, as is death, which Kemp focuses on as an important Modernist trope, particularly in women's writing.

Finn's article is noteworthy as one of the few pieces to compare a range of Modernist short stories by women: Mansfield, Richardson and Woolf. Likewise, Kemp's essay compares stories by Richardson and Sinclair, whose short fiction has rarely been discussed together despite some critical comparisons having been drawn between the two writers in relation to their novels.<sup>12</sup> It is also noteworthy that whilst there are few comparative discussions of Modernist women's short stories, studies have been carried out which relate the women's stories to those of their male contemporaries. For instance, a PhD thesis by Nora Lynne Bicki entitled *Modernist Discourses* (1993) analyses short stories exclusively, comparing the work of Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf to that of D H Lawrence and James Joyce. Likewise, Arnold Weinstein's *Recovering your Story* (2006) discusses the stories of Proust, Joyce and Faulkner with those of Woolf.

However, by 2006, critical examination of the short fiction of Richardson and Sinclair was still extremely rare despite their focus on some of the recognised clichés of Modernist experimentation: the inner life, fragmentation, ambiguity, epiphany, and the relationship between the individual and society to

name just a few examples. Moreover, their stories show the same concern with liminality as their more frequently discussed contemporaries, Mansfield and Woolf. For this reason, this study focuses solely on women's significant contributions to the Modernist short-story genre whilst at the same time seeking to avoid a view of Modernism as divided along a gender polarity.

Numerous critics have already claimed that Modernist women writers were traditionally excluded from serious critical discussion on the basis of their gender.<sup>13</sup> Whilst these assumptions are undoubtedly valid, the fact that Richardson's and Sinclair's stories have been sidelined whilst those of Woolf and Mansfield have not, suggests that gender is not the sole reason for their critical neglect. It is also noteworthy that whilst Woolf is considered one of the few 'canonical' Modernist women writers, her short fiction is one aspect of her work that has not received due critical attention.

This thesis maintains it is liminality that characterises the form, content and context of the Modernist short story, and suggests that the 'in-between' nature of the genre is a likely explanation for its critical neglect. The following chapters therefore examine the liminal aesthetic for its own sake, illustrating how this is a particularly pervasive theme in Modernist short fiction and exploring the extent to which these four women writers found a shared interest in the liminal trope. As opposed to presenting an overtly feminist analysis or subscribing to the view of women's Modernism as a separate literary 'subculture', however, I suggest how women developed a liminal aesthetic that makes a significant contribution to literary Modernism through the short story form.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, it is perhaps this very critical neglect that has enabled the short story to develop unhampered as a freer, more unrestricted experimental form than the conventional novel. As Valerie Shaw notes, it is precisely because the short story has lacked prestige in comparison with poetry, drama and novels that it has been 'free to cultivate diversity in an uninhibited way' (Shaw 22). The



shorter pieces Woolf called 'wild outbursts of freedom' thus offered a creative potential through which these four writers found a way out of their Victorian heritage and began to experiment with freer, more impersonal styles of writing.

The 'white spaces that lie between hour and hour' are fleeting and transient. They are simultaneously elusive and tangible, like the chimes of the clock in Woolf's 'A Dance In Queen's Gate' which, in dividing hour from hour, are 'dropped from another world' but are, nevertheless, 'pure and distinct' (165); or the threshold in Richardson's 'Tryst' dividing not only inside from outside, but the 'expanded being' of the inner life from socially dictated roles (*JP* 59). In embracing the realm of the liminal, the short stories of Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf demonstrate its embodiment of the ominous threat of exclusion with a realm of creative and potentially subversive possibility. It is the Modernist preoccupation with liminal entities, as well as the tension implicit within this restrictive yet subversive paradox, to which I devote attention in the following chapters.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Anthropological studies of liminality were developed by Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage*, originally published in France in 1908, and Victor Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982). Van Gennep originally identified the meaning of liminality as a 'transition between' (see *Ritual* 41). Liminality is becoming increasingly discussed in the work of Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, see pages 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, in Woolf's *The Waves*, the character, Rhoda, who claims that the 'spaces that lie between hour and hour' are 'my life' resides in a psychotic borderland, trapped in an isolated, traumatic 'outside' state from which her only means of escape is suicide (*TW* 156-158).

<sup>3</sup> See Pound, *Make it New: Essays*. The transitional context of Modernism is discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Woolf herself referred in her *Diary* to the challenge her short stories presented to fictional boundaries, reflecting 'I am less & less sure that they *are* stories, or what they are' (*D* 2 325).

<sup>5</sup> Fromm claims that Sinclair's interest in her lengthy novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*, waned later in her life. In 1945 Richardson produced a spate of new short stories. 'Haven' appeared in the August 1944 issue of *Life and Letters*, 'Excursion' in *English Story* in 1945, and two stories entitled 'Visitor' and 'Visit' in the September 1945 issue (see Fromm 365).

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair's stories are discussed in relation to these themes in Chapters 2, 3, 6 and 7.

<sup>7</sup> Beth Rigel Daugherty claims that whilst Woolf's short fiction has not been ignored entirely, 'the stories averaged only about three entries a year in the *MLA Bibliography*

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between 1999 and 2003', and articles ran to one or two out of approximately forty-five in the annual Woolf conference *Selected Papers* ('Transforming Stories' 102).

<sup>8</sup> Cf Llantada Díaz, María Francisca. 'May Sinclair's *The Three Sisters* as an Early Example of Modernist Fiction' *A Journal of English and American Studies*, 22 (2000): 61-81; Harris, Janice H. 'Challenging the Script of the Heterosexual Couple: Three Marriage Novels by May Sinclair' *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 29.4 Fall (1993): 436-58; Troy, Michele K. 'May Sinclair's *The Creators*: High-Cultural Celebrity and a Failed Comedy'. *English Literature in Transition* (1880-1920), 47.1 (2004): 50-74. Wilson, Cheryl A. 'The Victorian Woman Reader in May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier*. Self-Stimulation, Intellectual Freedom, and Escape'. *English Literature in Transition* (1880-1920), 46.4 (2003): 365-81.

<sup>9</sup> None of Sinclair's other story collections has been reprinted with the exception of *The Intercessor and Other Stories*, published by Books for Libraries in 1970.

<sup>10</sup> See Neff, "'New Mysticism" in the Writings of May Sinclair and T S Eliot', and 'May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* as Metaphysical Quest'.

<sup>11</sup> Bluemel, Kristin, *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997; Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text* Trans. Victoria Appelbe, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999; Radford, Jean 'Impersonality and the Damned Egotistical Self: Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*' In: Reynier, Christine Ed. and Intro; Ganteau, Jean-Michel (ed. and intro.); *Impersonality and Emotion in Twentieth-Century British Literature*. Montpellier, France: Université Montpellier III: 2005, 87-95; Stamm, David. *A Pathway to Reality: Visual and Aural Concepts in Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage*, Germany: Francke, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See Kaplan, Sydney. "'Featureless Freedom" or Ironic Submission'.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Garrity's *Step-Daughters of England*, Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land*, Hanscombe and Smyers's *Writing for their Lives* and Angela Smith's *The Second Battlefield* all suggest that the Modernist women were marginalised on the basis of their gender. My discussion in Chapter 1, pages 30-33, also demonstrates that arguments surrounding the cause of women's critical neglect on the basis of their gender has been thoroughly covered by feminist critics.

<sup>14</sup> Elaine Showalter uses this term to describe women's writing in *A Literature of Their Own* (11).



## Chapter 1

### The Modernist Short Story: A Liminal Context

When persons, groups, [or] sets of ideas, [...] move from one level or style of organisation or regulation of the interdependence of their parts or elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of *margin* or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance (Victor Turner, *Ritual* 44).

The Modernist short story evolved in an historically transitional era. Occurring in a perceived period of transition between the two ages of the Victorian and the Edwardian, Modernism ‘trembles in the balance’ between a negated past and an as yet unattained future, posited on an elusive yet tangible boundary in between. In the short story, these interrelated attributes are connected by the common consideration of the *margin* or *limen*; the border or threshold state defined by Turner and Van Gennep as liminal. This chapter considers the potentially reciprocal relationship between the historical context, form and subject matter of the Modernist short story, suggesting that the historical circumstances surrounding its emergence bear a direct relation to its sustained fascination with in-between spaces.

In view of the elusiveness of the boundaries traditionally defining Modernism, it is unsurprising that defining its cultural and historical context is a matter of some contention. As Raymond Williams acknowledges, the term ‘Modernism’ is ‘frustratingly unspecific, the most ‘recalcitrantly *unperiodising*’ of the major art-historical ‘isms’ (3). In spite of its elusiveness, theorists have nevertheless attempted to bookend the beginning and the decline of literary



Modernism, some placing the onset as far back as the 1890s, others claiming that the Modernist revolt started after the First World War. Peter Faulkner, for instance, sets a specific time frame, asserting that the arts of the period 1910-1930 have a 'clear cultural identity to which the term "Modernist" can reasonably be applied' (Faulkner 13). As Ellmann and Feidelson point out, however, to attempt to define modern literature is to tackle an area that is 'intimate and elusive', both more immediate and more obscure than the reassuring landscape of the past (Ellmann & Feidelson v).

Ellmann and Feidelson's observation of simultaneous immediacy and obscurity as a defining characteristic of literary Modernism suggests a connection between the latter and the often-paradoxical nature of liminality. The 'space between' is elusive yet tangible, a physical yet metaphorical boundary which evades straightforward definition. This 'intimate' yet 'elusive' landscape of the liminal characterises the emergence of the Modernist short story, reflecting not only the historical and literary context, but also the themes it embraces. Transitional states of war, death, rites of passage and pilgrimages are frequent points of interest in Modernist short fiction. Moreover, the short-story form typically blurs the boundaries between dichotomies like the spiritual and the secular, the subjective and the social, and the extraordinary and the everyday.

The context and content of the Modernist short story are thus connected by the common attributes of the liminal: boundaries, in-between spaces, marginality and transition. The Modernist writers themselves identified the period they were writing in as transitional, frequently acknowledging that the approximate period between the turn of the twentieth century and the Second World War was a time of radical change. One such writer was Dorothy Richardson who in a 1939 review of James Joyce's novel *Finnegan's Wake*, identified a shift in literary form 'from concentration upon the various aspects of the sublime and beautiful to what may be called the immediate investigation of

reality' ('Adventure for Readers' 426). Precisely when that shift occurs though is, as Richardson admits, 'not easy to say' (ibid). Likewise, Virginia Woolf defined a watershed between the traditional and the modern, pointing again to a difficulty in locating that elusive historical boundary. For Woolf, the change was not 'sudden and definite', as if 'one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered'. But the change was apparent nonetheless and, 'since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910' ('Bennett and Brown' 70).<sup>1</sup> The shifts noted by Richardson and Woolf between traditional and modern literary distinctions occurred when the writers who considered themselves 'moderns' were striving to 'make it new' (Spender xii-xiii). The Modernist rejection of classic realism and the 'traditional' novel structure in favour of new, radically experimental forms and techniques, coincided with a literary and historical context of what Turner terms the 'interfacial region' of the *margin* or *limen*.

It was during this context that the short story enjoyed a resurgence in popularity, leading H G Wells to comment that the last decade of the nineteenth century was 'a good and stimulating period for a short story writer [...] short stories broke out everywhere' (qtd Stanford 14). Prior to this, interest in the short story had steadily been gaining momentum following Edgar Allan Poe, who H P Lovecraft referred to in 1927 as the inventor of the short story in its present form. Whilst Poe's stories and criticism generated interest in the genre of supernatural fiction, he was also influential in championing the short story form in general. In a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1837 volume of *Twice-Told Tales*, Poe compares the short story favourably to the novel, asserting that in short fiction, 'the unity of effect or impression is a point of the highest importance' (60). A second important attribute is the length. For Poe, whilst extreme brevity posed the danger of degeneration into epigrammatism, the alternative 'sin' of extreme length is 'even more unpardonable' (61). In his preference for brevity and his

assertion that the historical traditions of the short story distinguished it from the novel, Poe was, as Charles May points out, the first to make this case, although others continued to write about the short story in a similar vein (xvi). In *The Philosophy of the Short Story* (1907), Brander Matthews also distinguishes between the short story and the novel and, like Poe, emphasises that 'a true Short-story differs from the Novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression' (73).<sup>2</sup> B M Ejexenbaum follows Poe in his relation of the origins of the short story to the oral traditions of folklore and anecdote as opposed to those of the novel, which derives 'from history, from travels' (81).

The Modernist short story typically breaks with these received literary definitions, working against Poe's insistence on length, aesthetic unity and a sense of closure as defining the 'ideal' short story. The Modernists redefined Poe's somewhat formulaic definitions of a 'good' short story by a strategy Benzel and Hoberman describe as 'trespassing' fictional boundaries (*Trespassing* 1). However, Poe's work did have a discernible influence on the Modernist fascination with the uncanny. As Sinclair's most recent biographer has noted, mysticism is one of the most dominant yet critically neglected attributes of literary Modernism (Raitt 233). Yet the discernible Modernist tradition of short stories focusing on the uncanny differs from its predecessors in various ways.<sup>3</sup> Most significantly, unlike the earlier work of Poe, Modernist uncanny stories blur the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The Modernist engagement with the uncanny also demonstrates a connection with liminality. As Paul March-Russell contends, the supernatural tale was far from being in a decline coinciding with 'High Modernism' after 1918. Rather, it was in transition, becoming 'a seedbed for that other rich and strange phenomenon known as Modernism' ('Introduction', *Uncanny Stories* 21).<sup>4</sup>

These considerations of the liminal form and content of Modernist short fiction reveal an oblique, ambiguous form and content that resists



straightforward interpretation. These stories are not easily categorised as, for instance, 'war stories', or 'ghost stories'. Their themes overlap and intersect, and a number of the stories I discuss incorporate several liminal attributes at once. For instance, Woolf's 'Kew Gardens' may be read equally as a war story and a ghost story, whilst Sinclair's 'Where their fire is not Quenched' is as much a commentary on the commonplace tragedy of failed personal relationships as a speculation on the nature of an after life. Therefore, whilst the following chapters are constructed in relation to their concerns with specifically defined liminal entities, they avoid grouping them in accordance with these somewhat restrictive labels, and instead try to take account of their fluidity and multiple interpretations.

As previously suggested, Modernist short fiction is not only flexible in its subject matter, but also its form. Typically experimental, the stories frequently combine poetry with prose, such as in the lyrical repetition of Woolf's 'A Haunted House' or the fluid imagery and changes in tempo and differing states and times discernible in Richardson's sketch 'Strawberries'. Short fiction also blurs genre boundaries. Stories and sketches are not always easily definable from essays: fiction and non-fiction are frequently indistinct. In the writing of Richardson and Woolf in particular, there is a close affinity on occasion between story and essay. The short story in itself thus enables a link to be made between many accepted literary distinctions, challenging fictional and literary boundaries by nature of its intrinsically liminal, in-between and marginal form and content. Clare Hanson substantiates this point in her observation that the short story is 'a form that 'mediates between the lyric poem and the novel: within this "space" it exhibits a protean variety' (9). As such, many Modernist short stories are characterised by ambiguity and have a disturbing, unsettling quality.

It is perhaps these ambiguities that enable a further connection to be made between the short story and Turner's definition of *margin* or *limen*. A

traditionally marginalised genre, the short story is, as Hanson puts it, a marginal and excluded art form, the workings of which have a 'tendency toward the expression of that which is marginal or ex-centric to society' (*Gender of Modernism* 300). Likewise, Ian Reid noted in 1977 that the short story was traditionally sidelined in favour of its 'heftier relatives, novel, poetry and drama' (Reid 2).

In terms of the Modernist short story specifically, Valerie Shaw observed in 1983 that the genre had 'not been assigned any definite role in accounts of Modernism which invariably focus almost exclusively on poetry and the novel' (Shaw 18). Dominic Head's *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (1992), also analyses the relationship between Modernism and the short story and sketches the field of research carried out on the genre. According to Head, the short story suited the concerns of the Modernist aesthetic and the form often implies the 'typicality of a specific episode', the narrative limitation demanding oblique expression through imagery and symbolism (7).

Shaw's study, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*, significantly equates the impact of the modern short story to looking at an Impressionist canvas 'because it leaves a sense of something complete yet unfinished [...] objects are not determinate and surfaces are not organised according to representational outline' (Shaw 13). This is significant bearing in mind Woolf's association with Fry's 1910 Post Impressionist exhibition as a significant era of change. Moreover, after viewing the paintings of Van Gogh at the exhibition, Katherine Mansfield wrote to her painter friend Dorothy Brett that she had learned from them 'something about writing [...] a kind of freedom – or rather, a shaking free' (qtd Alpers 121). Thus the short story form facilitates the Modernist preoccupation with the fragmented, dehumanised self and with an authorial detachment from its characters.



The result is a typically Modernist tendency towards ambiguity, paradox and an uncertain surface structure, connecting the short story form to the accepted characteristics of Modernist literature. As Malcolm Bradbury and James Macfarlane suggest, amongst these characteristics are the aims

to objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind's inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalise the rational, to defamiliarise and dehumanise the expected, to conventionalise the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of *everyday* life, [...] to secularise the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, [...] and uncertainty as the only certain thing (48).

The blurring of the boundaries between these apparent dichotomies is a noteworthy characteristic of Modernist short stories focusing on liminality, or, as Benzel and Hoberman put it, in a genre characterised by the trespassing of boundaries. The blending of the spiritual with the secular is discernible, for example, in the many Modernist artefacts associated with the pilgrimage: a journey with overlapping spiritual and secular elements. The pilgrimage and its associated state of exile embraces a state of *limen* that exists outside ordinary social constraints. A prevalent Modernist metaphor, *Pilgrimage* is evoked not only in the title of Richardson's fourteen-volume experimental novel, but also within short stories that explore literal and metaphorical rites of passage. These stories demonstrate how the pilgrimage is a means and an end in itself, capturing the transitional essence of constant concern to literary Modernism.<sup>5</sup>

The conventionalising of the extraordinary and challenging of the boundary between the commonplace and the eccentric, the spiritual and the secular, is an important attribute not only of the pilgrimage but also the Modernist 'moment' around which many short stories are centred. The

'epiphany' or moment of being depicted in these stories reveals liminal characteristics, demonstrating Victor Turner's contention that liminality is a constructed 'cultural realm which is defined as "out of time", ie, beyond or outside the time which measures secular pressure and routines' (*Ritual* 24). This accords with Frank O'Connor's definition of the short story form itself, in which 'significant moments' must be 'carefully chosen indeed' and enable readers to 'distinguish past, present and future as though they were all contemporaneous' (O'Connor 22).

A delineation of progressive temporality is a recurring literary strategy in the Modernist short story, and, as Turner's definition suggests, is a prominent attribute of the 'transition between'. The connection between the short story and the 'moment' in this way potentially relegates it to a smaller, inferior art form: the novel in miniature. O'Connor's analysis of the genre refutes this view, sharing with Poe the definition of the short story as being distinct from the novel, and insisting that the conception of the short story as a 'miniature art' is 'inherently false' (ibid 27). Alternatively, as G K Chesterton suggested in 1906, the Modernist short story reflected the transience of life itself. The growing attraction to the short story in this era was according to Chesterton 'a sign of a real sense of fleetingness and fragility; [...] existence is only an impression, and, perhaps, only an illusion' (85).

These observations of the significant moment and the 'fleetingness' captured within Modernist short fiction refer more to the importance of the revelatory moment than to an erroneous assumption of the inferiority of a marginalised and 'miniature' literary genre. This is borne out by a diary entry in which Virginia Woolf mentions 'how many little stories come into my head! [...]' One might write a book of short significant separate scenes (*D* 3 157). Woolf's use of the adjective 'little' in relation to significant scenes is striking here, suggesting that the 'epiphany', or moment of vision, arises out of ordinary

situations in spite of its function as a revealing mechanism of 'some order behind appearances' (*MB* 72). In the stories of Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf, the epiphanic moment is a space between spiritual and secular, 'solid' or transient states of being, and extraordinary and everyday. It is a 'spiritual manifestation', as James Joyce put it, which reveals commonplace, everyday experience. In the stories of these four writers, as Woolf phrased it in her novel *To the Lighthouse*, 'the great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark' (*TTL* 118). As Annette Oxindine also suggests in her discussion of Woolf's sapphist sketches, the use of the word 'little' does not necessarily suggest that moments of being are trivial; 'on the contrary, "little" is an adjective associated with Woolfian epiphanies' (Oxindine 59).

As these examples illustrate, both the form and the content of the Modernist short story are based around liminal elements: the blurring of genre boundaries, and the undermining of dichotomies between phenomena like the extraordinary and the everyday or the spiritual and the secular as defined by Bradbury and Macfarlane. However, not only the form and content of the Modernist short story is liminal but also the historical context surrounding the increasing growth and popularity of the genre. Various movements began to emerge which were associated with their commitments to particular aesthetics: the Futurists, Imagists, Cubists and Vorticists for example. Defining points of High Modernism include the movement Peter Nicholls defines as the 'Men of 1914', consisting of Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T S Eliot and James Joyce (Nicholls 166).

The year 1922 alone is noteworthy for the simultaneous appearance of such radically experimental artefacts as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and what these texts had in common was a break with traditional aesthetic forms and structure. A group of



artists not conforming to any one particular aesthetic 'movement', but nevertheless sharing the common aim of 'making it new', also appeared in the form of the 'Bloomsbury Group'. The group became something of a Modernist cliché in spite of the fact that Leonard Woolf suggested 'Bloomsbury' was a 'term – usually of abuse – applied to a largely imaginary group of persons with largely imaginary objects and characteristics' (qtd Lehmann 5).

The emergence of these diverse groups and movements suggests that Ezra Pound's definition of Modernism as a form of palimpsest, a 'super-position', of 'one idea set on top of another', ('Vorticism' 92), is perhaps more accurate than defining it as a monolithic literary tradition.<sup>6</sup> For Stephen Spender, modern art stems from an artistic consensus that 'the ultimate reality of our time is inapprehensible and can best be expressed by distortion of apparent reality. Thus various 'isms': the invention of systems like cubism or vorticism, stand in for the perceived reality' (*Struggle* 176). However, in its rejection of concepts like 'realism' and 'tradition', Modernism was paradoxically dependent on those concepts. Characterised by ambivalence, Modernism was in Ellmann and Feidelson's view 'as much imbued with a feeling for [its] historical role, [its] relation to the past, as with a feeling of historical discontinuity' (vi-vii).

This historical discontinuity, a transitional period caught in a space between past and future, characterised the literary context of the Modernist short story as well as its aesthetic content and structural form. War is a typical condition of *limen*, the threshold status where previously established social boundaries are eroded and have yet to be redefined. The two World Wars are examples of how contemporaneous historical events were influential in shaping the liminal aesthetic of the Modernist short story. War embodies many of the paradoxical and unsettling elements of liminality, which is arguably why Mansfield, Sinclair and Woolf consistently relate it to an 'outsider' state. This is significant in relation to Frank O'Connor's study of the short story: aptly entitled

*The Lonely Voice*, in which he contends that the short story articulates the position of the displaced, isolated individual, or those who live outside the conventions of society. For O'Connor, short fiction also speaks for 'a submerged population' which is 'by its very nature in need of a coherent voice' (133). Woolf's notion of a 'society of outsiders' attempts to provide that voice. In both her story 'A Society' and essay *Three Guineas*, Woolf conceives of this outsider position in the context of war. Likewise, the stories of Mansfield and Sinclair also make the connection between war and the outsider, but they question whether this is necessarily liberating, or whether it merely marginalises and silences.

War is not the only aspect of historical discontinuity surrounding the growth of literary Modernism and the short story. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with a high point in periodical publishing and print technology, which also distinguishes the early years of the twentieth century as a period of transition.<sup>7</sup> As Elaine Showalter notes, in this period the wane in popularity of the traditional three-decker novel helped to create a market for short fiction which was catered for in the periodicals (Showalter, viii). T O Beachcroft also makes a direct connection between the development of the short story and the spread of magazines, claiming that it was through periodicals that short fiction 'acquired a currency which made it an important feature of literary production' (*The Modest Art* 1).

As documented by Spencer Eddy in *The Founding of the Cornhill Magazine* and George Worth in *Macmillan's Magazine*, the boom in periodical publishing in this period coincided with an increase in literacy and the repeal of the newspaper tax in 1855. The *Cornhill* magazine, launched in 1859, was originally conceived as one of the first 'shilling monthlies' in the flourishing periodicals market in which the short story thrived. Walter Benjamin further suggests that by 1900 technical reproduction was of a standard that permitted it



to reproduce 'all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public' ('The Work of Art' 221-2). Thus a transition took place in technology at around the turn of the twentieth-century, enabling the growth of the short story genre which depended largely on the periodicals market for its publication and circulation.

The growth in the periodicals market substantially fostered the growth of the short story. As noted by Malcolm Bradbury, the little magazines coincided with a period of literary and critical revolution as well as enabling the emergence of the short story form (Introduction, *Calendar of Modern Letters* vii-viii). Antony Alpers also probes the connection between the growing periodicals market and the emergence of literary Modernism, and goes as far as to suggest that without the 'little magazines', it would be hard to say 'how Joyce and Eliot and Pound would have changed things as they did' (Alpers 130).

The 'Men of 1914' had a strong involvement with the newly emerging periodicals, a noteworthy example being the appearance in 1914-1915 of Wyndham Lewis's radical magazine, *Blast*. The publication, a manifesto of what Pound termed the 'Great English Vortex' as a metaphor for London, was originally planned as a quarterly magazine but ultimately ran to only two issues. Pound's influence in publishing also stretched to the publication of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the *Egoist* (1914-20), and *Ulysses* in the *Little Review*. T S Eliot edited the *Criterion* for the whole of the seventeen years during which it appeared: 1921-1939; his own *The Waste Land* and Sinclair's short story 'The Victim' appearing in the first number. Many of the other writers who published work in these magazines produced short fiction and literary criticism, and some, like Chekhov, Kipling and Hemingway as well as Woolf and Richardson, also enjoyed fruitful careers as journalists.

The emergence during this transitional era of new periodicals such as *The Yellow Book*, *The Savoy* and *The Dome* also boosted the growth of the

short story and various Modernist movements. *The New Age* assisted with the dissemination of literary Modernism by publishing the writings of such Fabian-affiliated authors as Shaw, Wells, and Bennett whose work was considered revolutionary and avant-garde. It also had feminist affiliations with magazines such as *The Freewoman* (1911-12), *The New Freewoman* (1913) and *The Egoist* (1914-19), which later superseded the *Freewoman* and was presided over by Rebecca West and later Ezra Pound.

The literary connections of Pound and Eliot also extended to May Sinclair, who had considerable influence as a literary critic and wrote in defence of both poets when their associations with the controversial periodical, *Blast*, earned them negative criticism. Sinclair claimed that the Vorticism for which *Blast* was famed sidelined Pound as the serious artist he undoubtedly was. She argued that his talent could have made him one of the most popular poets of his day but for one obstacle: the fact that he had refused to 'leave Vorticism and every other "ism" alone' ('Reputation of Ezra Pound' 471). Sinclair also responded to a request from Pound for an article in defence of Eliot.<sup>8</sup> Sinclair's article, which appeared in the *Little Review* in December 1917, defends Eliot against the establishment criticism voiced by the 'comfortable respectability of Mr Waugh and *The New Statesman*' claiming that Eliot had been judged harshly because of his associations with *Blast*. However, little concession had been paid to the quality of his work ('Prufrock' 449).

May Sinclair's critical influence extended beyond her relationships with Eliot and Pound, however. She is noteworthy for coining the ambiguous term 'Stream of Consciousness', which she applied in the context of a literary method for the first time in relation to Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*.<sup>9</sup> Modernists frequently used this technique to explore the inner life, which features prominently in Modernist short fiction. Whilst Woolf and Richardson were amongst the major proponents of the stream of consciousness method,

Mansfield rejected this stylistic form in favour of free indirect discourse, which is arguably a liminal narrative style in itself as it occupies the space between narrator and character.

The inner life was also a resonant theme in Modernist short fiction, although this has received less critical attention than the novels. The stories of Richardson and Woolf in particular sought to capture the fluxes and nuances of the mind, frequently challenging the strictures of language and speech. Their depictions of the inner life connect the ordered world of spoken discourse with the random chaos of consciousness, with language serving as a bridging mechanism between the two. The inner life is thus a liminal theme. It also formed part of wider critical debates about the stream of consciousness metaphor, in which Sinclair and Richardson were amongst the most enthusiastic participants. In 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson' (1918), Sinclair wrote admiringly that in *Pilgrimage*, Richardson had 'plunged so neatly and quietly that even admirers of her performance might remain unaware of what it is precisely that she has done. She has disappeared while they are still waiting for the splash' ('Novels' 443). The metaphor of 'plunging' into the novel is significant in the context of a review on the stream of consciousness method, and it is noteworthy that the same metaphor appears in Richardson's later review of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1932), another striking example of the stream of consciousness technique. Richardson advises readers to 'plunge' into the novel, 'provisionally, here and there; *enter* the text' ('Adventure' 428).<sup>10</sup>

Virginia Woolf echoed Sinclair's praise of Richardson's method in reviews of *The Tunnel* (1919) and *Revolving Lights* (1923), but her appreciation of the stream of consciousness form was more ambivalent. Her review of *The Tunnel*, for instance, ends with the double-edged comment that in her opinion, the novel was 'better in its failure than most books in their success' (17). She also later refused to review *Interim*. Evaluating her decision in her diary, Woolf



declared: 'I refused to do Dorothy Richardson for the Supt. The truth is that when I looked at it, I felt myself looking for faults; hoping for them. And they would have bent my pen, I know. There must be an instinct of self-preservation at work. If she's good then I'm not' (*D* 1 315). Some years later, in 1937, Richardson also declined to review Woolf's *The Years* on the basis that none of the preceding books had moved her deeply. In spite of her admiration for the work, Richardson remarked pointedly that the *London Mercury* 'ought to put the book in the hands of someone to whom she meant a great deal' (Fromm 318-9).<sup>11</sup>

Another writer whom Woolf shared an ambiguous literary relationship with was Katherine Mansfield, whose story 'Prelude' she printed and published on her own press, The Hogarth Press, in 1918. However, Woolf thought Mansfield's story 'Bliss' 'cheap'; the product of a mind of 'very thin soil, laid an inch or two deep upon very barren rock' (*D* 1 179). For her part, Mansfield wrote to Woolf that the flower bed in her story 'Kew Gardens' was 'very good. There's a still, quivering, changing light over it all and a sense of those couples dissolving in the bright air which fascinates me' (*CLKM* 1 327). In 1921, however, she wrote of Woolf's *Monday or Tuesday* stories, a volume in which 'Kew Gardens' was contained, that Woolf was 'detached from life - it won't do - will it? Nothing grows. Its [sic] not even cut flowers, but flower heads in flat dishes. I don't think one can "scrap" form like that' (*CLKM* 4 285). Mansfield also wrote to her husband, John Middleton Murry in November 1920 that she disliked Woolf's work and 'It wasn't for nothing that she got so excited by a mark on the wall, my Jo! that was a revelation ....' (125), having previously written to Woolf telling her she had reread the story 'and liked it tre-mendously' (*CLKM* 2 170n).<sup>12</sup>

Mansfield not only found fault with Bloomsbury artefacts; she also distrusted 'professional' literary criticism and despised academic snobbery.

Raging against the elitism of Bloomsbury, whom she privately dubbed the 'Blooms Berries', she wrote 'I hate them because I feel they are the enemies of Art - of real true Art' (CLKM 2 336).<sup>13</sup> As Antony Alpers has noted however, when Mansfield began writing regular reviews for the *Athenaeum* her criticism was 'always tactful, courteous and fair, and was totally free from literary jargon or reviewers' clichés' (Alpers 294).<sup>14</sup> Clare Hanson has also noted that Mansfield's criticism represents 'a genuine attempt to take on the literary establishment on its own terms' (Introduction, *Critical Writings* 1). Her opposition to academic elitism remained consistent and she expressed it unequivocally in her reviews. This attitude is reflected particularly in Mansfield's *Athenaeum* review of Woolf's *Night and Day*, entitled 'A Ship Comes into the Harbour'. The tense relations between Woolf and Mansfield were strained further when the latter claimed that Woolf's novel, whilst 'extremely cultivated, distinguished and brilliant' was antiquated: 'Miss Austen up-to-date' ('Harbour' 314).<sup>15</sup> Unlike May Sinclair, Mansfield was also dismissive of the 'Men of 1914' brand of Modernism, referring in a letter to Ottoline Morrell to 'that unspeakable Ezra Pound' and the 'arrogance' of James Joyce (CLKM 2 343).

As Mansfield was primarily a critic and a writer of short stories, it was the periodicals market that enabled her career to flourish. The *New Age* printed a number of her early stories, including some from her first published volume *In a German Pension*.<sup>16</sup> In December 1911, however, Mansfield broke with the *New Age* and sent a story to the newly launched *Rhythm* that had first appeared during the summer of that year. One of the editors of this periodical was Murry.<sup>17</sup> *Rhythm* was short-lived, as was the *Blue Review*, the periodical Murry set up with Mansfield which superseded it. The *New Age* later waged war against Mansfield and Murry, and they responded by defining their own unique Modernist aesthetic. Murry reacted to negative criticism towards the *Blue Review* in a similar vein to Mansfield's stance on artistic elitism, asserting that

We believe we have something to say that no other magazine has said before or had the courage to say. It is a thousand times more important that we should live to say such things, than we should bow before the cries of artistic snobbery (*Rhythm* 2 36).

The episodes with *Rhythm* and the *Blue Review* were brief, but they led to the Murrays' first encounter with Bloomsbury. In spite of the Murrays' disapproval of the elitism and snobbery of the 'Blooms Berries', their connections with this group enabled them to forge important contacts, determine a clear objective towards a Modernist aesthetic, and continue the trend of publishing short stories.<sup>18</sup>

The Hogarth Press, founded by the Woolfs in 1917, pursued a similar set of objectives. Like the Murrays' publishing efforts, the Hogarth Press illustrates a commitment to the new experimental literary forms as well as the short story. It brought to prominence the Woolfs' own work, as well as that of others who produced the kinds of arts they admired and wanted to bring to public attention. Moreover, the Woolfs were not only influential in publishing and distributing work that might not otherwise have been published, but also in the development of the marginalised short story genre. In 1919, *Kew Gardens* was offered to Hogarth's subscribers as one of three books, and received an enthusiastic review in the *Times Literary Supplement*.<sup>19</sup> As Lee recounts, the Woolfs subsequently received enough requests for new subscribers to merit an immediate reprint by commercial printers (Lee 366-7). This is significant in that instances of short stories published by themselves are rare. Woolf's publication of 'Kew Gardens' through the Hogarth Press thus not only enabled her to foster her own artistic development through the short story, but also enabled the short story form to achieve recognition in its own right.



A crucial function of the Press was to make Woolf independent as a writer, and it also established her as a writer of short stories. She wrote to David Garnett of the 'greatest mercy of being able to do what one likes – no editors, or publishers' (L 2 167). Moreover, this 'sense of freedom' in being her own publisher is echoed in Woolf's attitude to her story writing. The stories in *Monday or Tuesday* afforded Woolf a 'diversion', as she wrote to Ethel Smyth, 'they were the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style' (L 5 231). The importance of the short story as an experimental form is also indicated in Woolf's letter to Garnett, written in 1917 after the publication of 'The Mark on the Wall', in which she wrote of the potential, through Hogarth, of inventing a 'completely new form':

I'm very glad you liked the story. In a way it's easier to do a short thing, all in one flight than a novel. Novels are frightfully clumsy and overpowering of course; still if one could only get hold of them it would be superb. Anyhow, it's very amusing to try with these short things (L 2 167).

As Woolf's correspondence illustrates, the Hogarth Press, as well as periodicals like *Rhythm* and the *Blue Review* which strove to publish new, innovative Modernist work, played an important part in the development of the short story as a Modernist art form. Moreover, in spite of the tension between Mansfield and Woolf, there are similarities between the stated aims of Murry in the *Blue Review* and the 'Woolves' at Hogarth. Murry claims his contributors were 'our friends', 'these are the men for whom we fight, and who by their creations fight for us, in the battle for expression in which we are engaged' (Murry, *Blue Review* 2 36). Likewise, Leonard and Virginia Woolf published friends who would not otherwise have found a way of getting their work into print and, as Hermoine Lee

has noted, were committed to publishing difficult and challenging new work (Lee 371-2). Some of the friends whose work they published, including E M Forster, Roger Fry and John Maynard Keynes as well as T S Eliot, Vita Sackville-West and Katherine Mansfield, were also major literary figures.

The prominence of Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf within contemporary Modernist literary debates is discernible in their literary criticism, as well as in their overlapping literary, publishing and editing interests and their work in the short story form. The fact that they published and reviewed one another's work is also noteworthy in view of Margaret Gullette's observation that Modernist women writers supported themselves by writing and paying close attention to each other's work, thus ensuring introduction into the canon and the clubs. Gullette refers to a review of Marianne Moore by H D in the *Egoist* and May Sinclair's review of Dorothy Richardson in both the *Little Review* and the *Egoist*, and points to the fact that women were frequently reviewed in mainstream newspapers and noteworthy periodicals: the *Bookman*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Review of Reviews*, *Smart Set*, and *London Times*' ('Creativity' 35). Gullette also comments on the large number of biographies written on women writers during this period, including John Cowper Powys's biography of Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair's on *The Three Brontës*, and Virginia Woolf's writings on many earlier figures. She suggests that the project of solidifying the reputations of earlier women writers was well established in this period, ensuring that 'the history of women's writing was thickening, getting texture, power, reputation' ('Creativity' 36).

A sizeable school of feminist literary criticism takes a similar line to Gullette in making the case for women having a literary tradition of their own. Woolf's own writings proved enormously influential in this area and set a precedent which later critics followed. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1978) followed Woolf's endeavours in *A Room of One's Own* to

reestablish and rediscover previously sidelined women writers. Similar projects included Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land* (1987), and Hanscombe's and Smyers's *Writing for their Lives* (1987). *No Man's Land*, which examines a range of women writers including Olive Schreiner, Kate Chopin, Amy Lowell, Edith Wharton and H D, sets out an argument for Modernism as a battle between the genders with words as their weapons. Likewise, in *Writing for their Lives*, Hanscombe and Smyers trace a 'mutually supportive' network amongst women writers and examine what 'might be distinctively female about these interactions and their literary results' (*Writing* xiv).<sup>20</sup>

Showalter credits her title *A Literature of their Own* to J S Mill, but her project carries echoes of *A Room of One's Own* in which Woolf had endeavoured to trace back a matriarchal literary heritage: 'we think back through our mothers if we are women' (*Room* 69). Showalter discusses lesser-known women writers in the context of 'major' canonical women writers like George Eliot, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf, and states her aims as 'to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture' (*A Literature* 11).<sup>21</sup>

The term 'subculture', used specifically by both Showalter and Scott in relation to women's writing, is potentially damaging and misleading, as it implicitly relegates women's Modernism to a minor or inferior version of mainstream, 'male' Modernism.<sup>22</sup> Also, as the criticism of Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf demonstrates, networks of Modernist women writers were by no means always mutually supportive. Hermione Lee's assertion that Woolf was 'not an especially generous champion of her women contemporaries' (373) could equally be applied to Mansfield and Richardson as is evidenced in their criticism. The *Literature of their Own* line of argument in feminist criticism is commendable for reinstating forgotten women's writing, but it is nevertheless apparent that the claims it makes for supportive networks and



'subcategories' of Modernist women writers are not universally the case. The literary relations and criticism exchanged between Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf, as well as their attitudes to one another, were often disparaging. For instance, on meeting Sinclair for tea in 1909, Woolf described her as 'a woman of obtrusive, and medicinal morality', whereas Richardson's hostility to Sinclair extended to her informing Bryher in 1923 of a dream about her death: 'I dreamed last night that I saw someone shoot May. S. [sic] & heard her last words' (*Windows on Modernism* 84).<sup>23</sup>

It might therefore be suggested that critics have overplayed the notion of a supportive network of women writers who constituted an entirely separate literary subcategory in an attempt to make a case for an independent existence for women in their own right. However, to do so is potentially to sideline the centrality of their contribution to literary Modernism in close collaboration with their male counterparts. As previously noted, for instance, Sinclair supported Eliot and Pound, whilst writers of both genders proved important influences on each other.

Later critics have distanced themselves from the kind of analysis that portrays Modernist women writers as a separate network of Modernists or as an alternative, 'sub' category of a hegemonic masculine Modernism. Bonnie Kime Scott's anthology *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) begins to show a more diverse critical stance than the general or feminist studies of Modernism referred to earlier. Scott points out that the 'experimental, audience challenging, and language-focused writing that used to be regarded as Modernism becomes for some of our editors a gendered subcategory – "early male Modernism"' (Scott 4). Scott's anthology, however, includes texts by both male and female writers and sets lesser-known writers like Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Djuna Barnes and Hugh MacDiarmid alongside canonical Modernists like Ezra Pound,

T S Eliot, D H Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. This avoids the tendency among earlier critics to segregate women's writing from men's.

As far as the mutually supportive networks between men and women publishers, editors and writers are concerned however, it is appropriate to question why Woolf and Mansfield survived as canonical Modernist writers whilst Richardson and Sinclair slipped into obscurity. The latter two writers were both influential literary critics and popular and prolific writers of their time, yet their work, and their short stories in particular, have received little scholarly attention. One explanation for this is evident from the fact that, as the above discussion demonstrates, the power of decision over what survived in the literary sphere resided with the publishers, editors, printing presses and periodicals. It is significant, in view of this consideration, that both Mansfield and Woolf married influential literary critics and editors, whilst Richardson married an impoverished artist and Sinclair chose not to marry at all. Moreover, Richardson and Sinclair left minimal private writings, whilst both Mansfield and Woolf left behind large volumes of diaries and journals which were later published by their husbands.

Several biographical details that connect Mansfield and Woolf arguably have some relevance to their continued position at the forefront of critical interest. Both died early and dramatic deaths: Mansfield of a severe haemorrhage caused by tuberculosis at the age of 34, and Woolf, aged 59, by committing suicide in fear of an imminent attack of mental illness. Following their deaths, both John Middleton Murry and Leonard Woolf started publishing campaigns in order to keep their wives' work 'alive' and in the public realm, in defiance of explicit instructions in the wills of both.

In the knowledge of her imminent death, Mansfield left a letter to Murry and deposited it at her bank, leaving him all her manuscripts but containing an injunction to 'please destroy all letters you do not wish to keep and all papers'.

A week later, she drew up a formal will in which she requested that he publish as little as possible of her remaining manuscripts, and 'tear up and burn' as much as possible (qtd Tomalin 227). In spite of these instructions, Murry not only promoted his dead wife's writing in his own magazine, but also organised with Constable a carefully timed publishing campaign of her work throughout the 1920s and into the 1950s.<sup>24</sup>

As Mansfield's biographer Antony Alpers has noted, the *Letters* of 1928 were extensively edited, with many harsh comments about friends and fellow-writers removed. Thus, as he goes on to point out, 'The image of Katherine [...] presented to the world had far more resemblance to Murry's "perfect" Katherine than to the Beauchamp actuality. In England, its adoration was followed in due course by embarrassment, and by a feeling that Murry had exploited his dead wife's work' (Alpers 388). This is borne out by the comments made by some of Mansfield's friends. Woolf, for instance, wondered in her diary whether 'people always get what they deserve, and did K M do something to deserve this cheap posthumous life?' (*D* 2 238). The Murrays' close friend D H Lawrence also wrote in 1925 that Mansfield 'was a good writer they made out to be a genius. [...] Katherine knew better herself but her husband, J M Murry, made capital out of her death' (*Lawrence: A Composite Biography* 503).

The circumstances surrounding the posthumous publication of Woolf's literary leavings and extensive private writings are markedly similar to those surrounding Mansfield's. Woolf's biographer Hermoine Lee observes that the Woolfs wished to distance themselves from critics like Murry, specifically because of his exploitation of his dead wife's work in the *Adelphi* that led to Sylvia Lynd accusing him of 'boiling Katherine's bones to make soup' (qtd Tomalin 241). Ironically, however, Leonard not only published Woolf's work after her own suicide in 1941, but before her body had even been found, he began talks with John Lehmann, for many years an employee of the Hogarth



Press, about how they would deal with her mass of unpublished material. As Lee puts it, Leonard Woolf planned to 'husband' Woolf's literary leavings, publishing them at carefully timed intervals 'over a long period of years'.

Lee also notes that Leonard made the decisions which set the terms of Woolf's posthumous reception and reputation, and this 'husbanding' of her posthumous resources 'controlled our access to Virginia Woolf for many years, for good and ill' (Lee 767). The posthumous publication of *Between the Acts* was duly agreed by John Lehmann and Leonard Woolf as what Lee describes as 'the start of a careful, deliberate campaign to keep Virginia Woolf in the public eye. For the next twenty-eight years of his life, Leonard Woolf was to become his late wife's executor, archivist and editor' (Lee 766-767).

A further similarity connects Woolf with Mansfield in terms of both women's final instructions as to what should be done with their papers. Nicolson and Trautmann, the editors of six extensive volumes of Woolf's letters, make reference in their introduction to the fact that the last words Virginia Woolf wrote were 'Will you destroy all my papers', and that this instruction appeared in the margin of her second suicide-note to her husband. Querying whether Woolf meant he was to destroy her manuscript of *Between the Acts*, her last novel, as well as her autobiographical writings, letters, notebooks and diaries, Nicolson and Trautmann conclude that her husband disregarded her instructions ('Introduction', L VI xi).

Richardson and Sinclair's survival for posterity poses a marked contrast to that of Woolf of Mansfield. In comparison to the extensive letters and journals the latter two writers left behind, both Richardson and Sinclair were obsessive about their privacy. No diary or journal was left by either, and the earliest surviving letter to Sinclair dates from 1897. Suzanne Raitt has also observed that some of Sinclair's extant letters have small sections cut out of them, 'as if whoever was preparing her correspondence for posterity was on the lookout to

events or feelings which needed to be excised' (Raitt 6). Likewise, Richardson was most reluctant to provide biographical information to journals or publishers and for many years even her exact date of birth was unknown. In her introduction to Dorothy Richardson's collected volume of short stories (Virago, 1989), Trudi Tate writes that in 1929 this reluctance 'became a form of self parody when she answered the *Little Review's* request for a photo with a picture of a fat baby' (Tate, 'Introduction' *JP* x).

It is perhaps no coincidence, therefore, that Mansfield and Woolf were retained within the privileged boundaries of the Modernist literary canon whilst the once prolific, famous and influential writers and critics, Sinclair and Richardson, were not. Frank O'Connor speculates that Mansfield's work has possibly been 'obscured by her legend [...] and the work is always considerably dimmer than the legend' (O'Connor 128-9). Whilst this is an unfairly negative assessment of Mansfield's work, it has some validity in that the legends surrounding the lives of Mansfield and Woolf did conceivably, until recently, play a part in preserving them as the sole canonical female Modernists in a largely male genre. Sabine Vanacker supports this claim, noting that our knowledge of many Modernist women 'focuses much more on their, admittedly, often eccentric lives, than on their writing. The life and loves of H D, Stein, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson seem to undermine their writings in the critical literature, in a way that the lives of T S Eliot, Joyce and Pound do not' (Vanacker 115).

It is perhaps these considerations which point most prominently to the restrictive and liberating potential of liminality; a paradox on which not only the Modernist liminal aesthetic, but also its transitional social and literary context, rests. In the short fiction of May Sinclair in particular, there is an ironic recognition that the 'immortalising' of authors after death by publishers and biographers determines this transitional process into posterity or obscurity. Her stories 'The Pin-Prick', 'The Wrackham Memoirs' and 'Fame' are all

commentaries on this theme. Death is the ultimate transitional, liminal process, embodying in the most extreme terms the dual potential for liberation and extinction that characterises liminality.

This is borne out by an ironic biographical 'replay' of the events Sinclair summarises in her 'death of the author' stories. The symbolic literary 'deaths' of Richardson and Sinclair, following their literal deaths, have been more absolute in terms of their marginalisation from the Modernist literary canon than those of Mansfield or Woolf. The most significant process affecting this marginalisation was the emerging, and subsequently declining, periodicals publishing market that simultaneously nurtured and sidelined the short story, and which preserved the 'bones' of Mansfield's and Woolf's textual corpus whilst metaphorically burying those of their contemporaries, Richardson and Sinclair. As the examination of all four writers' stories together in this thesis shows, these writers are equally deserving of critical attention in the genre.

The close association between the short story form and periodical publishing has also damaged the standing of short fiction for posterity, and yet, paradoxically, ensured its continuing popularity.<sup>25</sup> As Valerie Shaw puts it, 'the magazines which provide the most accessible market for short fiction are by the same token sure to corrupt it' (Shaw 7). Factors such as space limitations, restrictive house-styles and editorial stipulations 'dictated the storyteller's art although such exigencies are not to be regretted if they chafe the art of the short story into existence (ibid). This is a further manifestation of the liminal paradox that characterises the Modernist short story from its form to its historical context. The rise of the periodical is a central element of the development of the short story that ultimately proved both the strength and downfall not only of the short story itself, but also of individual writers.

As far as the liminal historical and literary context of Modernism and the simultaneous emergence of the publishing and periodicals market is concerned,



as Zygmunt Bauman has noted, 'there is no consensus on what is to be dated. And once the effort of dating starts in earnest, the object itself begins to disappear' (Bauman 3-4). For Bauman, the contentious issue 'what is Modernism?' is unlikely to find resolution because of its transience and elusive quality (10).

It is thus plausible that the continual interest in liminal aesthetic themes conveyed in the Modernist short story derives from its literary and historical context. The transitional phase of *margin* or *limen* ironically works to both obscure and promote Modernist short fiction, but the relationship between Modernism and liminality is a mutually interdependent one. For Woolf, the Modernist short story was characterised by the quality that 'the old divisions melt into each other' ('The Russian Point of View' 227), illustrated in the way in which the short story 'trespasses boundaries' between genres. The form, content and context of the Modernist short story are transitional, marginal and centre on in-between spaces. Modernism cannot be divorced from liminality.

The liminal themes discussed in detail in the stories of Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf across the following chapters are frequently bound up with the instantly recognisable attributes of literary Modernism: stream of consciousness, pilgrimage, mysticism and the epiphany. They also have in common a fascination with liminal themes. As Richard Dilworth Rust points out, dominant liminal images include doors, windows, mirrors, curtains, candles, gateways, shorelines, and the tomb (443), and the short fiction of these four writers is pervaded with these images. Woolf's 'The Lady in the Looking Glass', for instance, concerns a narrator attempting to find 'truth' in a mirror and finding only a distortion of her perceived reality. The candles in Woolf's 'Kew Gardens' and Sinclair's 'The Pin-Prick' symbolise death, mourning and suffering, and the children in Richardson's 'The Garden' and Mansfield's 'Prelude' are terrified by the 'space between' their familiar yet alien surroundings, and are pursued out of

the garden and the house respectively by a terrifying, unnamed 'it'. In Woolf's 'An Unwritten Novel', 'The Mark on the Wall' and 'Sympathy', the newspaper stands between reality and the respective narrators' misconceptions of that reality.

Moreover, the central action of many of these stories takes place at liminal times such as dawn and dusk, childhood, and old age. Richardson's 'Excursion' and Mansfield's 'Miss Brill' are commentaries on ageing, for instance, whilst Richardson's sketch 'Journey to Paradise' and Mansfield's story 'Prelude' focus primarily on childhood. Woolf's essay 'A Walk by Night' occurs at dusk, whilst the opening of Mansfield's 'At the Bay' and denouement of Woolf's early essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate', occur at dawn.

The essence explored in these stories is of 'timeless' times or moments of transition. This elusive 'space between' is the domain of the Modernist short story, which plays consistently on the paradox of liminality; the elusive yet palpable, extraordinary yet everyday, annihilating yet liberating space of the 'transition between'. Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf play on these tensions by consistently trespassing boundaries. In both their context and their content, the stories of these four writers embody as well as reflect the transient and paradoxical 'space between' of the liminal entity.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This date coincided with Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist art exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries in 1910 and 1912, which included work by Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and Derain. Fry's purpose in organising the exhibition was to make the public aware of a new movement in art that 'implied a reconsideration of the very purpose and aim as well as the methods of pictorial and plastic art' (*Vision and Design* 237).

<sup>2</sup> Matthews claimed in 1884 that the short story was as worthy of theoretical attention as the novel. In the years between 1884 and 1901 he published several versions of his eventual 1901 study *the Philosophy of the Short-story* (see Shaw 4-5).

<sup>3</sup> There are particular connections between Poe's story 'The Masque of the Red Death' and Woolf's early essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate', as well as between Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and May Sinclair's 1911 story 'The Intercessor'. See Chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Nicholls' book *Modernisms* debunks the commonly held assumption that the Modernism presided over by Pound and Eliot, and which was characterised by its



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commitment to reactionary 'grand narratives of social and psychic order', was the 'hegemonic one' (Nicholls 167).

<sup>7</sup> Editorship of *The Cornhill* was taken over in 1871 by Virginia Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, which Donna Rhein suggests inspired the Woolfs to become their own publishers (*Handprinted Books* 4).

<sup>8</sup> Pound wrote to Margaret Anderson, his co-editor at the *Little Review*, that it would 'add sting to slap on *Quarterly* to have a brief bo[u]quet from the former generation' (qtd Raitt 199).

<sup>9</sup> Richardson's fourteen-volume novel and Sinclair's *Mary Olivier: A Life*, both explore the consciousness of one main protagonist.

<sup>10</sup> As well as producing a large body of essays on feminism, Richardson also reviewed amongst others H G Wells, *In the Days of the Comet* in *Crank* 4.11 (November 1906), 372-376, and contributed a review entitled 'Novels' to *Life and Letters* 56 (March 1948), 188-192. For a comprehensive list of Richardson's reviews and criticism see Fromm 426-427.

<sup>11</sup> Gloria Fromm has pointed out that Richardson objected to Woolf's elitism and snobbery, 'making much of her father's intellectual pursuits and his self-styled "connections" with Oxford and reducing her prose to 'stylistic show' (Fromm 318-9).

<sup>12</sup> Woolf's short story 'The Mark on the Wall' was in *Two Stories*, published by the Hogarth Press in 1917.

<sup>13</sup> For their part, the Woolfs referred to the Murrys as 'Grub Street', a derogatory term meaning literary hacks.

<sup>14</sup> The novelists Mansfield reviewed, amongst others, included Joseph Conrad, George Moore, Vita Sackville-West, May Sinclair, Rose Macaulay, Gertrude Stein and Hugh Walpole.

<sup>15</sup> The review of *Night and Day* offended Woolf deeply, as is evidenced in a letter to her brother-in-law Clive Bell about a conversation with Murry. She wrote, 'I couldn't grasp what Katherine meant but I thought she disliked the book and wouldn't say so, and so muffed her points. Murry, however, tells me that she admires it, but thinks my "aloofness" morally wrong' (qtd. Murry, *Letters to Katherine Mansfield* 224).

<sup>16</sup> These were 'The-Child-Who-Was-Tired', a story which raised controversy over its similarity to Chekhov's 'Sleepyhead', 'Germans at Meat', 'The Baron', and 'The Luft Bad'.

<sup>17</sup> Mansfield's stories published in *Rhythm* included: 'The Woman at the Store' in IV 1.4 Spring 1912, 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped', under the pseudonym 'Lili Heron' in Vol II No. IV (September 1912), and in Vol II No IX, 'The Little Girl' appears under the same pseudonym and 'New Dresses' under the name of Katherine Mansfield.

<sup>18</sup> The literary connections shared by the Woolfs and the Murrys arguably led the latter to set up their own press, the Heron Press; for which the workroom in their basement became the press room. Its first production was Murry's *Poems, 1917-1918*; the second, Mansfield's story 'Je ne parle pas Français' (Alpers 285). In turn, the Murrys' involvement with periodicals is plausibly what led the Woolfs to nurture a scheme of launching their own periodical. This is evidenced in a diary entry of 15 February 1915, in which Woolf wrote that her brother-in-law Clive Bell 'approves our scheme of a Periodical, & he is a man of business, whatever he may be as an artist' (*D* 1 35). Added to this entry is an editor's footnote stating 'The Woolfs' dream of producing a magazine of their own was recurrent but never realised' (ibid).

<sup>19</sup> The others were John Middleton Murry's *The Critic in Judgement*, and a book of T S Eliot's poems.

<sup>20</sup> Their book also includes a chapter on how women writers printed, published, edited and reviewed each other's work.

<sup>21</sup> Showalter's discussions include Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing, Sarah Grand, and Margaret Drabble.

<sup>22</sup> Showalter, *A Literature* 11; Scott, *Gender of Modernism* 4.

<sup>23</sup> Woolf to Lady Robert Cecil, 12 April 1909.

<sup>24</sup> *The Dove's Nest and Other Stories* appeared in June 1923, followed by *Poems, Something Childish*, and later, in 1927, Mansfield's *Journal*.

<sup>25</sup> See Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' and Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*.



## Chapter 2

### The Journey not the Arrival: Pilgrimage and Exile as Modernist Liminal Metaphors

Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds (Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* 18).

The act of passing between one situation and another necessarily involves a journey, whether literal or metaphorical. In literary Modernism the journey was a resonant theme, the importance of which is neatly summarised in the title of Leonard Woolf's autobiography *The Journey not the Arrival Matters*. Journeys are characterised by a temporary immersion in what Van Gennep calls a 'special situation', the liminal state in which travellers waver between two worlds. His reference to the transition between places or states of being as a 'magico-religious' situation relates specifically to a journey embodying both spiritual and secular attributes. This is the pilgrimage, which Turner and Turner significantly describe as 'the great liminal experience of the religious life' (*Pilgrimage* 6-7).

The title of Dorothy Richardson's autobiographical novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*, is an obvious example of the metaphor of the journey used in a Modernist context to symbolise rites of passage, the spiritual journey, and life itself. Richardson's twelve-volume narrative explores the consciousness of one character, Miriam Henderson, and incorporates both the spiritual and secular connotations of the pilgrimage. As Maren Linett has noted, the novel's title has its roots in Christianity and is modelled on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The novel embraced the new, Modernist experimental forms and was noteworthy for the fact that, as May Sinclair observed, 'nothing happens, and yet everything that really matters is happening' ('Novels' 446).<sup>1</sup> The novel follows

the metaphorical pilgrimage of its protagonist's life; a phase in which the point of departure has been left behind but a destination has not yet been reached. As a metaphor, the journey, pilgrimage and associated condition of exile typify Van Gennep's definition of liminality as a 'transition between'.

This chapter explores the implications of the pilgrimage, as well as its associated conditions of liminality and exile, as Modernist metaphors. The consistent interest of short story writers in this theme illustrates the centrality of both the secular journey and the spiritual pilgrimage throughout literary Modernism. Connections have frequently been made between Modernism and displacement, alienation and exile. For instance, Peter Nicholls stresses the relationship between these conditions and the lives of Lawrence, Joyce, Pound, Eliot and Mansfield to name several examples. Noel Stock equates Ezra Pound's arrival in London with a 'pilgrimage', without which he could not have written the poetry he did, or 'clarified his own mind and the minds of others with his prose' (Stock 29). Biographical studies of Modernism and exile typically depict the nomadic lifestyles of writers associated with the genre. None of the 'Men of 1914' were born in England, with the result that their various contributions to Modernism were, as Nicholls puts it, 'highly sensitive to questions of exile and cultural displacement' (Nicholls 166).

Similarly, Andrew Gurr identifies among colonial writers a pattern of flight into exile which results in 'the subsequent creation of a sense of identity through the vision of home built in fiction' (*Writers* 30). Ironically, however, the urge towards nostalgia and writing about home impedes the sense of identity in artistic creation that it seeks to encourage. Gurr cites Stephen Dedalus's famous comment in *Ulysses* that 'History [...] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake' in his conclusion that 'an identity based on one's own home, one's past, one's history, is precisely the condition which can be most cramping to artistic freedom' (*Writers* 10). The status of the alienated artist has therefore

tended to fix as canonical the works of radical estrangement. In the Modernist short story, however, the theme of the exile is prominent in a sense different from merely the alienated artist writing about home from a state of exile. In the stories discussed in this chapter, there is a discernible focus on the pilgrimage as a trope for exploring the exiled status of the liminar.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, through the liminal metaphors of pilgrimage and exile, these stories embrace not only the condition of nostalgia but also of alienation.

The pilgrimage is a widespread phenomenon occurring, as Turner and Turner have noted, 'in just about every major religious tradition' (*Pilgrimage* 3), but also having implications in the secular world. As Reader and Walter point out, academic studies of pilgrimage have tended to restrict themselves to its religious context, in spite of the fact that its scope extends beyond official religious traditions (Reader and Walter, *Pilgrimage* 5). Modernist short stories are frequently set in such in-between spaces as gardens or the seashore, or transitional areas like hotels, waiting rooms and railway carriages: spaces that are only occupied on a transitory basis. These spaces often have spiritual connotations and are frequently associated with metaphors of the journey, pilgrimage and associated states of alienation and exile. In the Modernist short story the pilgrimage, whether literal or metaphorical, seldom includes a resolution or an arrival at the journey's end. The story is the journey; the journey is the story.

Modernist fiction frequently follows a protagonist's literal or symbolic journey, and the act of passing between one state and another involves the suspension of the traveller's daily life in a characteristically liminal realm. The pilgrim is defined by Turner as the passenger or 'liminar', a situation closely associated with the shifting, nomadic and outsider status of the exile. Turner's view is supported by Edward Said, who relates what he calls 'the perilous territory of not-belonging' to the liminal phenomenon which characterises



pilgrimage ('Reflections on Exile' 177). Said's 'perilous territory', which Turner refers to as 'betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification' (*Pilgrimage* 2) is the space occupied by the pilgrim. Excluded from familiar society, the pilgrim enters a state of exile in passing, as Turner puts it, 'through a realm or dimension that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (ibid 2).

The journey is a prevalent Modernist theme. The mythic voyage is the subject of Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), whilst *Ulysses* denotes the *Odyssey* and relates to the artist's spiritual pilgrimage. Citing Joyce's remodelling of the Homeric Odysseus' journey, Reader and Walter note a pattern of Modernist literature in following 'the path trodden, metaphorically if not physically, by the literary heroes of earlier times' (*Pilgrimage* 8). Events in *Ulysses* span one ordinary day in Dublin, June 16, 1904 or 'Bloomsday', and typify the everyday events that are common attributes of Modernist fiction.

Whilst the representation of the pilgrimage is extensive in the Modernist novel, it is also prominent, although much less frequently discussed, in the short story. It is noteworthy that whilst in the process of writing *Pilgrimage* Richardson confessed that sometimes there were 'shorts' she felt she had to write rather than going on with *Pilgrimage*. "'They attract me'", she said' (qtd. Fromm 342). It is perhaps for this reason that Richardson's sketch 'Journey to Paradise', published in the *Fortnightly Review* of March 1928, coincided with a period in which she began to turn away from *Pilgrimage*. At this time, her thoughts had turned from the novelistic pilgrimage to her childhood trips to Devon (Fromm 218). 'Journey to Paradise' explicitly adopts the railway trip as a metaphor for life and, implicitly, death; the pilgrimage being a metaphor which amalgamates the secular, transitional journey with a spiritual quest. The rumbling of train wheels in the story is 'set now to hymn tunes sung quickly [...] to a song of its own, a wordless, exultant beating, it seemed, of life itself' (*JP*

127). The notion of death as an intrinsic condition of life is implicit in the religious terminology employed to depict the journey. The 'paradise' referred to in the title of the sketch, as well as the speeding of the wheel set to 'hymn tunes', indicates the spiritual nature of the pilgrimage.

'A Journey to Paradise' combines the child-protagonist's previous memories of her seaside paradise with her anticipation of her holiday to come, which she views as being 'perhaps the richer for the joys and agonies of that tremendous preliminary' (*JP* 130). At the same time, childhood memories are of necessity imparted from the distanced perspective of a mature narrator. As Derrida was later to theorise in the essay 'Force and Signification', language is the order of history. Within this order, speech is 'always already' embedded within historicity and 'meaning' is reinforced through repetition ('Force' 4).

The sketch amalgamates the beginning and end of the journey in memory. The narrator's descriptions of the 'seaside that is one place and has no name' (*JP* 122), the terrifying space of the waiting room in which she feels doomed to miss her 'heaven', and finally the window and the sea, are interspersed with her consciousness of the movement of the journey. For instance, Basingstoke is described as 'just a name, standing for a moment on its board on a platform and presently gone' (*JP* 127). The backward and forward motion of the speaker's consciousness between past, present and future in this way anticipates Turner's view of the liminal rite of passage as a state that changes the quality of time. In other words, the liminal is a phase 'beyond or outside the time which measures secular pressure and routines' ('Liminal' 24).

Richardson's sketch anticipates this observation in her subversion of linear temporality, summarised in the narrator's comment that 'the great events of the day came in the silence to life between memory and anticipation, blossomed in pictures upon the air vibrating to the song of the train' (*JP* 127). The phenomenon of a journey 'between memory and anticipation' is a continual

point of attention in Richardson's sketch. In its concern with liminal spaces, 'Journey to Paradise' is a commentary on the transitory nature of life. The coast is viewed as a liminal space, the 'ancient charm of land and sea in a relationship' (*JP* 120), and the speaker's sighting of the ocean coincides with her knowledge of the 'brave people' who ventured over it 'for diversion or for business. [...] The interspaces were legendary, matter for travellers' tales' (*JP* 120).

The 'interspace' is the main focus of the sketch. The physical linear progression of the journey takes a secondary position to the speaker's contemplation of the spaces she currently occupies: the 'endless summer', the garden with unknown boundaries, and the 'spaces of sunlit salty air' she anticipates at the end of her journey. The memory of the railway journey itself hovers in a liminal zone: *between* memory and anticipation. Moreover, the reference to the journey as encompassing both joys and agonies exposes the positive and negative duality of the liminal state. A symbol of this in-between phenomenon is the waiting room, a form of purgatory offset against the seaside paradise. This is described by the narrator as a 'fearful interval' embodying aspects of the uncanny. Its length terrifies her and the room is filled, in her eyes, with 'pictures of disaster'. The fear the waiting room evokes for the speaker is characterised by the opening of the door,

not upon a stranger or a porter, but upon the dreaded form of my father,  
upon his voice, urgent. It was now or never. And the pilgrimage that  
ended in the security of our reserved carriage was made always in the  
certainty that this time it was to be never (*JP* 126).

This passage evokes the Freudian notion of the uncanny, the 'eerily familiar' which Freud describes as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what



is known of old and long familiar' ('The Uncanny' 340). Moreover, the presence of a heaven, the purgatorial 'waiting-room', and the pilgrimage each relates to notions of the afterlife in the Christian religion. The fear the speaker experiences is a fear of the 'terrifying space' of the waiting room from which she will emerge either to embark on her journey or be prevented from doing so. The familiar figure of the father thus becomes a 'dreaded form'; the possible conveyor of the news that the journey might be halted before it begins. Significantly, the narrator's fear occurs in the waiting room, a quintessential liminal space. It is also striking that what she fears is 'never', which conceivably equates to a fear of the negative aspect of the liminal that annihilates rather than liberates. As the journey is depicted in the sketch in spiritual terms as a metaphor for life, the narrator's fear conceivably relates to a fear of death.

A similar commentary on the journey as a metaphor for mortality is discernible in Woolf's essay 'A Walk by Night', originally published in 1905. The essay is narrated from the viewpoint of one observer, for whom a walk by the sea becomes a disorientating experience because of an 'autumnal dusk' which falls 'before the party had fairly started homewards' ('A Walk' 80).<sup>3</sup> The dusk gives the narrator's accustomed surroundings a feeling of unfamiliarity. The lights in the distance create a disorientating effect, causing the speaker to question whether one could really see as in the daytime,

or was this some vision within the brain like those stars in which a blow scatters before the eye? There they hung, floating without anchorage, in soft depths of darkness in a valley beneath us; for directly that the eye had proved them true the brain woke and constructed a scheme of the world in which to place them ('A Walk' 81).

This disorientating experience is associated with images of the sea which pervade the text throughout: 'floating without anchorage', 'submerged persons' (81), voices 'reaching across great depths' (80), lights 'like the lights of ships passing at sea' (81), and 'the shores of the world' (81). These liminal images, all set in the context of the journey, become metaphors for life, and symbolise subjective existence as a transient state of being.

Whereas Richardson uses the pilgrimage to denote life, for Woolf, the sea is a metaphor for life and subjective consciousness, most notably in her mature novel *The Waves* (1931). Woolf's essay 'A Walk by Night' is a much earlier experimentation with the same themes, through which she conveys subjective consciousness as a spatial and cyclical *process*. The 'Walk by Night' narrator comments that 'the eye might bathe and refresh itself in the depths of the night, without grating upon any harsh outline of reality; the earth with its infinity of detail was dissolved into ambiguous space' ('A Walk' 82). This is typical of the way in which Woolf uses the liminal trope to examine space as an alternative to linear time. Life is portrayed as cyclical, determined by overlapping social relationships, movement, and changing patterns of dark and light. Thus the continuum of the traditional 'plot' is subverted in accordance with Turner's observation that liminality distorts progressive temporality and changes the quality of time ('Liminal' 24).

Towards the end of the journey, the people the walkers encounter become unfamiliar as 'they were not as the people of the daytime are' ('A Walk' 81). This presupposes Turner and Turner's commentary on the defamiliarising effects of travelling, when the pilgrims at the end of their journey encounter well-known images and icons which, as Smith notes, 'are made strange, a positive version of the uncanny' (Smith 12). Turner and Turner also stress how the pilgrimage makes the familiar appear strange in a rewriting of the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Religious images strike the returning pilgrim 'as

perhaps they have never done before, even though he may have seen very similar objects in his parish church almost every day of his life. The innocence of the eye is the whole point here, the “cleansing of the doors of perception” (*Pilgrimage* 10-11). In ‘A Walk by Night’, this defamiliarising technique is used to depict the return of the travellers to their home, where they find that ‘the walls of the house were too narrow, the glare of the lamps too fierce for those thus refreshed and made sensitive’ (‘A Walk’ 82).

The notion of ‘defamiliarisation’ has implications for the Modernist project in its endeavour to break with traditional narrative forms and embrace newer, experimental writing styles. Woolf’s description of the journey in ‘A Walk by Night’ achieves the effect that the familiar, as in Freud’s theory of the uncanny, appears alien in its clarity, and accustomed sights and objects are depicted as though they are being seen for the first time. Woolf referred to this disorientating effect in her essay ‘The Stranger in London’ (1908), in which she wrote that foreigners’ reflections on London are more vividly powerful because they have a ‘certain detachment’ (200). Elaborating on this point, she asserts: ‘we see our surface as though in some spontaneous mirror, and yet the image there is coloured by a number of personal and national idiosyncrasies which make it [...] full of suggestions for us’ (ibid).

‘A Walk by Night’ and ‘A Stranger in London’ both show similarities with Victor Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarisation. This is the means by which art ‘recovers’ the sensation of life, ‘to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The object of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms different’ (Shklovsky 4). In ‘A Walk By Night’, this technique is discernible in the comparison of the village by night to a ‘lonely’ ship at sea. For the narrator, the ‘little village anchored to the desolate earth’ is a far lonelier thing; ‘exposed every night, alone, to the unfathomed waters of darkness’ (‘A Walk’ 82).



In its use of the walk by night as a metaphor for life, Woolf's essay is ultimately a reflection on mortality. This is demonstrated at the walk's conclusion in which 'it seemed as though only the phantoms and spirits of substantial things were now abroad' ('A Walk' 82). 'Journey to Paradise' and 'A Walk by Night' both demonstrate an awareness of the 'perpetual journey' of life. Zygmunt Bauman links this specifically to modernity in his observation of an 'endemic inconclusivity of effort that makes the life of continuous restlessness' (Bauman 10). In other words, modernity is transient, a journey without end, in which 'any place of arrival is but a temporary station' (ibid 10-11). The 'station', Richardson's metaphor for the 'unknown country' in 'Journey to Paradise', is also reminiscent of Modernism's concern with the journey as a condition of life: fleeting, transient and liminal.

The structures of 'Journey to Paradise' and 'A Walk by Night' are also characterised by liminality, which is presented in both pieces as a 'space between'. Both the sketch and the essay defy classification as short stories. In their brevity and the metaphorical language employed within them, they embody the in-between characteristics of the liminal and stand between poetry and prose. Moreover, they occupy a space between autobiography and fiction, the distinction between these genres being blurred further by the use of the first-person narrator in both pieces. In their form, content, and even their categorisation as a sketch and essay as opposed to short fiction, these two distinctively Modernist works embrace the quality of the liminal on many levels.

The liminal is further privileged by the delineation of the temporally progressive 'plot', a technique used widely in Modernist short fiction. This is achieved by the fusing of memory with anticipation, a strategy commonly adopted by Richardson in her sketches. The Modernist short story typically employs a tactic identified by Andrew Gurr in which 'space has to be added to time. Distance in space reinforces the effect of distance in time' (*Writers* 10).

This effect is also referred to by Sandra Kemp, who points to a specific strategy of space displacing time in the fiction of women Modernists. In a discussion primarily focusing on short stories by Richardson and Sinclair, Kemp notes a tendency in their writing to embrace a new kind of temporality in which space (and the things in it) displaces time' ('Feminism' 100).<sup>4</sup> In Turner and Turner's analysis, liminal rites do not lead, even at their conclusion, to an instant reformation of social paradigms (*Pilgrimage* 2-3). Rather, liminality bears within itself 'not only *transition* but also *potentiality*, not only "going to be" but also "what may be"' (ibid 3). What liminality offers, then, is the potential for social or subjective change, although implicit in this change is the negative double bind of marginalisation or, in liminality's most extreme manifestation, annihilation. This duality is exposed in Kemp's essay, in which she claims that creation of a new temporality in which space displaces time offers the possibility of new subject positions. Thus possibilities for individual and social change are offered through liminality.

The liminal space is also the locus of concern in Richardson's story 'The Garden', originally published in the *Transatlantic Review* in August 1924. Like 'Journey to Paradise' and 'A Walk by Night', it depicts a metaphorical rite of passage, but this time from a pre-linguistic state to a speaking subject in early childhood. Like her earlier sketch 'Journey to Paradise', Richardson's 'The Garden' is a story of perception rather than a presentation of a sequence of events. For Richardson, the garden is a similar 'space-between' to the one she had already explored in 'Journey to Paradise' in the form of the railway journey. In this instance, the 'space between' stands as a barrier separating the domestic realm of the home from the outside world.

Paradoxically, as well as symbolising a child's transition to a speaking subject, the garden is also a symbol of regression.<sup>5</sup> Like 'Journey to Paradise', past, present and future are amalgamated in one perceiving consciousness.

This occurs most notably when the child-protagonist's stream of consciousness merges with the seasons, simultaneously viewing the garden in various states of weather and times of the year:

The smell of the dark pointed trees in the shrubbery. Raindrops outside the window falling down in front of the dark pointed trees. The snowman alone on the lawn, after tea, with a sad slanted face.

Shiny apples on the trees on Sunday with pink on one side.

The slippery swing seat, scrubby ropes tight. Tummy falling out, coming back again high in the air ...

The apples were near this part. In the sun. Where the cowslip balls hung in a row on the string (*JP* 22).

The relationship of the annual cycle to the individual consciousness is a characteristic strategy in Richardson's stories, her *Saturday Review* sketches in particular. Without any relation to the subject who reflects on it, this passage depicts the garden in various states of weather and at differing times of the year. The garden is viewed in the rain, snow and sun; the image of the snowman on the lawn, an emblem of winter, is juxtaposed with the ripening apples of autumn. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests, space may be viewed here, not as 'a sort of ether in which all things float' or the setting in which things are arranged, but 'the means whereby the positioning of things becomes possible' (*Phenomenology* 243). In the garden, this 'means' is the consciousness of the child, who, even though she does not yet have access to language, is 'removed' from the text by the perspective of an adult narrator. A presentation of objects in space is therefore impossible without recourse to language and its representation of the subjective consciousness.



'The Garden' depicts the metaphorical rite of passage involving the child's transition into her identity as a speaking subject. Her still-fluid ego-boundaries are evidenced in her inability to differentiate between herself and her surroundings. As she walks, she hears the sound of her own footsteps but perceives that 'the gravel stopped making its noise when she stood still. When the last foot came down all the flowers stood still' (*JP* 21). The child's movements belong to the external objects, primarily to the flowers to which, at varying points in the story, she attributes both good and threatening characteristics. At the outset, they are 'happy and good' (*JP* 21), but by the close of the narrative, by which time the child has taken a fall onto the gravel, they have become 'unkind' (*ibid* 24). The flowers thus occupy the dual positions of 'good' and 'bad' objects at various points in the story, in much the same way that the liminal is characterised as both threatening persecutor and positive liberator.

The child's response to the flowers is a fictional re-enactment of Melanie Klein's theory of object relations. In her paper 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States' (1940), Klein identifies the Depressive Position - the period preceding transition into language - as the central phase of a child's development. In the depressive position, the child's reaction to objects is characterised by a process of what Klein calls introjection and projection, dominated by aggression and anxieties which reinforce each other and lead to fears of persecution by terrifying objects. To these fears are added those of losing [...] loved objects'. The depressive position is thus characterised by 'persecution (by "bad" objects) and the characteristic defences against it, on the one hand, and pining for the loved ("good") object, on the other' (Klein 348).

In 'The Garden', this process is re-enacted in the relation the child attaches to the 'good' and 'bad' flowers. Moreover, her indistinct ego boundaries mean she is unable to differentiate between herself and the objects

surrounding her, or in Kleinian terms, between 'I' and 'Not I'. There is a marked divide in the child's consciousness between the area of safety and familiarity where the flowers are, and the dangerous liminal zone beyond. She believes, for instance, that it is 'safe out here with the flowers. Nothing could come here, on the path between the two sides coming down at their edges in little blues sitting along the path with small patted leaves' (*JP* 23). Beyond the boundaries of the garden, however, it is 'dark and cold'. The flowers by the back porch are perceived as threatened, 'not able to get away into the garden. Not able to go inside the kitchen. They were always frightened' (*JP* 23). Neither inside nor in the main garden, it is the liminal state of these flowers to which the child attaches threatening and frightening attributes.

The dissolving of the ego-boundaries between the child-subject and the objects in the garden in this way, equates to what Kemp calls 'seeing things without attachment from the outside', a prose-style in which 'things imprint themselves on consciousness irrespective of "sense" or "meaning"' (Kemp 102). In Richardson's story, this condition is palpable in a depiction of a child who is unable to make sense of or attach meaning to her surroundings. When she falls, she experiences her pain and her reactions to it as coming from outside of herself. 'Bang. The hard gravel holding a pain against her nose [...]. Here was crying again. Coming up out of her body, into her face, hot, twisting it up, lifting it away from the gravel to let out the noise' (*JP* 24).

In this presentation of the consciousness of a child who has not yet made the full transition into a speaking subject, the linguistic traps of a mature narrator conveying the experiences of a young child are exposed. The story is an adult's perspective on a child in the realm before the entry into language is made. The narrative mode is therefore marked by what Kemp calls 'its attenuation of human agency both as represented in the text, *and* as embodied in the act of writing' (*ibid*). This is possible in fiction only through a textual

representation of the depicted consciousness. Richardson's writing addresses problems of the relationship between subjectivity, identity, language, space and time. Her two stories of childhood 'Journey to Paradise' and 'The Garden' depict rites of passage as states of transition that can only ever be temporary. Attention is continually drawn to this in the garden, a space preceding the child protagonist's expected metamorphosis into a speaking subject.

In 'Tryst', a later story by Richardson published in *English Story* (1941), the privileging of liminality and spatial consciousness over historical temporality and sequential language occurs through the pilgrimage metaphor. The protagonist, this time a mature woman, discovers an extended self through a walk at a liminal time: twilight, to a liminal place: the seashore. The 'Tryst' of the title is an appointment promised to the woman by herself and kept. In this story, external spaces represent a space between the literal inside and outside. This condition is only discovered in the transient entity of a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage to the shore in which the protagonist embraces the typical exiled status of the pilgrim. This liminal state is ultimately discarded, but whilst she occupies it, the woman experiences a sense of liberation from her restricted sense of self.

The limited roles society offers the protagonist are suspended between her domestic world and the exterior space, which symbolises freedom from domestic responsibility. The protagonist's brief state of suspension between imprisonment and freedom renders her continually ambivalent. This is suggested in her reflection that 'the open sea, by the time she reached the sight of it, would be a mournful grey expanse sending her thoughts towards the flow of firelight, lamplight' (*JP* 58). The tension between inside and outside is also balanced in the story with the conflict between space and time. This is suggested in the expanded sense of being the woman experiences out of doors,



a feeling of infinite space as opposed to the constrictions of time within the house.

In the linear dimension, which in the story is attributed to the house, time itself is reduced, in Derrida's words, to 'the element in which a form or a curve can be displayed. It is always in league with a line or design, always extended in space level. It calls for measurement' (Derrida, 'Force' 16). As Fredric Jameson also points out, time 'is the system that generates a specific temporality and that then expresses that temporality through the cultural forms and symptoms in question' (Jameson 718). 'Tryst' exploits this tension between 'measured' time and the woman's 'elastically expanded' sense of being. The protagonist is depicted as caught up in this conflict, as is illustrated on her return from her walk when she finds herself longing for some extra time 'to reassemble the faculties demanded by the coming enclosure' (JP 59).

The house thus becomes a tangible symbol of the constricting mechanisms of society in which women are confined to domestic space. On the other hand, the space outside, as well as representing freedom, is intimidating in its representation of uncharted territory for women. As Mary Douglas notes in her anthropological study *Purity and Danger*, the coding of such spaces in society is a powerful controlling mechanism. The opposition between the liminal domain beyond society's external boundaries conflicts with its internal structure, serving as a site of power to 'reward conformity and repulse attack' (114). Typically, however, whilst these boundaries constrict, they also liberate. As Douglas also recognises, there is energy in 'margins and unstructured areas' (ibid).

In 'Tryst', this energy results in a transitory moment of respite from the protagonist's domestic responsibilities. For a mere moment, her liminal status enables her to envisage what a life outside her domestic world might be like. On her return home, she is compelled to discard her newly discovered 'expanded'

sense of self, and constrict her subjectivity once more into the role of servitude demanded of her. The state between these two worlds, however, bestows a liberating power on the protagonist, indicating the potential for a subtle shift in her subjectivity as a result of the experience. As Elisabeth Bronfen has noted, a suspension between opposites enables the liminar to develop a psychic state 'which makes it possible to experience the boundary between material, corporal existence and the immaterial, spiritual world' (Bronfen 2).

The 'Tryst' protagonist experiences this state as she turns to 'toil guiltily back' from the sea. Her sojourn by the shore, fleeting and momentary, is unspectacular, revealing only a waveless grey sea, 'sheeny under the approach of moonlight, fitting the angle of the rising ground that hid the shore and the tide's edge' (*JP* 59). By contrast the stream the woman encounters on her return walk is a 'lonely little wanderer; holding festival down there, unseen, alone'. The stream is equated with the woman herself. She experiences an affinity with and almost spiritual reaction to the stream, at which 'she felt her heart bound within her at the strange sight of it [...] her spirit reached down' (*ibid*). This psychic state between the material world of the house and the spiritual world associated with the outside may, according to Bronfen, conceivably relate to Richardson's desire 'to be perfectly in two places at once'. For her, 'the ideal psychic, political and spiritual attitude consists in a unifying state of suspension between opposites' (Bronfen 2). This liminal state is a continual focus of attention in 'Tryst'. Having experienced an outsider status, the 'outside' is always there for the protagonist to access, however briefly and unsatisfactorily, as it is a realm that threatens to oppress as well as liberate.

The final state of suspension in the story occurs at the threshold. This is the point at which the woman sheds her spatial, spiritual sense of being and reshapes herself into the subject her relations believe they know. The story, in drawing continual attention to the state between the opposing entities of inside

and outside, challenges rigid and exclusionary categories. As David Waterman has pointed out, these binary polarities ignore many aspects of the world that do not fit into them. The structure of binary opposition therefore enables meaning to be fixed by culture with the effect of 'creating' identity for its subjects (*Disordered Bodies*, 'Introduction' unpaginated).

The pilgrimage in 'Tryst' is merely a brief respite from the subject positions categorised as 'female'. Upon return, these positions are re-adopted. When the family's possessions are lost, it is the wife and mother figure that finds them. It is also she who lays out all the preparations for their evening meal, and feels a sense of guilt when wishing for a brief period of free time for herself.

This experience of re-integration into the social norm typifies the final stage of Van Gennep's threefold liminal rites, and is described as a 'hover[ing] between two worlds' (*JP* 60). Upon the 'Tryst' protagonist's return home, these worlds separate. In making herself respond in the expected manner she 'felt, with the sounding of her own voice, the door of her inward life close against her as surely as the house door clicked into its latch' (*JP* 60). The woman's re-entry into her enclosed space coincides with the brief re-opening of the door and a sound coming from outside, the distant *Koo-roo, koo-roo-roo-roo* of a questing owl' (*JP* 60). As the protagonist hovers between inside and outside, the fleeing moment before the 'door of her inward life' closes is characteristically liminal.

The image of the door, a literal boundary between interior and exterior space, demonstrates the liberating and threatening duality of liminality. At times, as Bachelard points out, the door is 'closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open' (Bachelard 222). Bachelard views the door as a symbol of language, which he suggests also 'bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up' (Bachelard 222). This characteristic is evident in the



stories discussed so far in this chapter, which show how language embodies this restrictive and liberating potential.

This paradox is specifically explored through the liminal states that evoke these qualities, and these stories explore rites of passage amalgamating both secular and spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage. The transient status of the journey in Modernist fiction is marked by a temporary state of exile. This tendency is also noted by Joseph Francese, who claims that Modernism's concern with lived reality, subjectivity and identity bears a close relation with the figure of the exile who is fragmented by the loss of a sense of place and community (Francese 1-3). Gurr relates this specific condition to Katherine Mansfield with the claim that 'in the years of her exile she gradually evolved a set of artistic and psychological needs which could only be answered by creating in her art a record of her colonial home (*Writers* 9).

The prominence given to the biographical circumstances of Mansfield's own life of exile frequently omits the attention she gives to the theme in her stories, not only in terms of the nostalgia characterising the New Zealand narratives, but also to alienation. Ironically, discussions of exile in Mansfield's work tend to sideline the marginal theme of displacement and alienation Mansfield exploits in her fiction. A frequent focus of this state is on the alienated condition of the female traveller. Mansfield observed in her *Journal* the 'impertinent, arrogant and slightly amused attitude[s]' of waiters and hotel servants towards the lone woman traveller and the 'ominous infallible thing' which according to her, happened to 'every woman on earth who travelled alone' (*JKM* 33). This observation is emphasised in her stories, particularly 'The Little Governess', in which a young, inexperienced governess undertakes a night journey to Munich, is ultimately cast adrift in a foreign country, and must then continue her journey in an unknown direction.

The liminal metaphor of the pilgrimage is apt in this story as, according to Derrida, separation and exile 'always designate the interiority of a breaking-off with the world and a making of one's way within it' ('Force' 8). To reproduce such experiences in written text cannot, however, directly recreate the experience, which can be indicated only through metaphor. For Derrida this necessarily involves 'a departure from the world toward a place which is neither a *non-place* nor an *other* world' (ibid).

In a similar vein, feminist critics have questioned dominant modes of opinion on exile and alienation. Gillian Hanscombe, for instance, has related femininity to exile, claiming that women writers felt alienated from a tradition of masculine hegemony and that this alienation was a symptom of their femininity (*Art of Life* 22). Mansfield's story exposes the negative aspects of this liminal state for a woman who is doubly alienated by her status as a foreigner and a woman.

The dynamics of oppression experienced by the governess are, however, more complex than merely a focus on gender issues. The governess's youth and inexperience also place her in a third dimension of liminality. Her disorientating experience begins after the boat stops and she leaves the safety of the Ladies' Cabin. Looking down to the dark landing-stage, the governess 'moved forward with the sleepy flock, all knowing where to go and what to do except her, and she felt afraid' (CS 175-6).

The story depicts a physical journey although the sub-theme is a metaphorical rite of passage from childhood into a more cynical adult world. With the adulthood and independence offered to the governess by her journey into the working world come the threatening and frightening aspects of the unfamiliar condition of the liminal. This is represented as a sexual threat. As the story progresses, the governess finds herself increasingly at the mercy of male characters that attempt to exploit her sexuality and vulnerability. Having

refused a porter a tip when he tricks her into allowing him to carry her luggage, the governess's firm stance against him gives her confidence and she is 'frightened no longer but proud that she had not given that franc. "I can look after myself – of course I can"' (CS 177). The governess's euphoria is short-lived, however, as the porter takes revenge by returning with an elderly male passenger and tearing the *Dames Seules* label from the window (CS 178).

During the course of the story, the governess comes to view her travelling companion as a 'fairy grandfather' (187). In spite of reservations she accepts an invitation from him to show her around Munich, and is horrified when he violates her trust by sexually assaulting her. He 'held her against the wall, pressed her against his hard old body and his twitching knee, and though she shook her head from side to side, distracted, kissed her on the mouth. [...] She ran' (CS 188).

The continual threat of sexual violation in 'The Little Governess' conveys an apparently depressing cautionary tale about the pitfalls facing the lone female traveller. Diane Filby Gillespie, however, points out how a reflection on the values society has inculcated in women, does not necessitate a withdrawal into a sphere dominated by those values. Rather, it is to rebel 'in a tangible way against the status quo manifested in art as in society' (Gillespie 132-3). Gillespie also claims that to shift the emphasis from an 'all-knowing, frequently male authorial voice to the dramatised inner life of an individual character is to give that character increased integrity and autonomy' (Gillespie 132-3). For women in particular, the shift is liberating. However, Mansfield's story operates on more levels than merely giving a voice to the oppression of women by men. 'The Little Governess' is less a story of liberation than a necessary rite of passage into adulthood. It is this condition to which Mansfield's story refers in her use of the journey as a metaphor for modernity in a story of a literal as well as a metaphorical rite of passage.



The notion of a general rather than an exclusively gendered state of exile is further evident in 'The Little Governess' from the fact that, at the outset of the narrative, the areas occupied solely by women appear safe and secure. Towards the end, however, women's 'space' increasingly excludes the governess and becomes less and less protective, until women too are complicit in the little governess' alienated state. In contrast to the woman at the Governess Bureau who suggests that she 'mistrust people at first rather than trust them' (CS 175) and the comforting security of the Ladies' Cabin on the boat, the governess is increasingly exposed to women who also contribute to her exiled status.

This occurs with the employer who abandons her to her fate in a foreign country and the women on the journey back to the hotel, who view her with suspicion after she has suffered the sexual assault. On this short tram journey, the governess has to endure the stares of her fellow passengers, the conductor's eyebrows and 'the *hochwohlgebildete Dame* talking her over with a scandalised friend' (CS 189). Moreover, on arrival back at the hotel the governess discovers that a waiter, whom she has earlier dismissed for staring at her, has informed her employer that she had arrived and gone out with a gentleman. The employer having left, the governess is left in exile at the hotel, her journey incomplete.

The condition of the exile depicted in Mansfield's story demonstrates Edward Said's observation that the borders and barriers which subjects look to in order to attain a sense of identity contain the properties of inclusion and exclusion. Like the dialectics of language which enclose and open up through 'meaning', borders either enclose the safety of familiar territory whilst shutting the exile out, or become prisons. In their status outside the dialectics of open and closed, as Said points out, 'exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience' (Said 185). This question of potential for border crossing is

raised in 'The Little Governess' by the unaccomplished journey. The text is left open ended, and the question of whether the resolution of the governess's journey results in powerlessness or a new adult self-awareness remains unanswered.

The themes of exile and the journey are also the subject of May Sinclair's story 'The Return of the Prodigal' (1902). In this story, however, there is a reversal in the state of alienation. The prodigal son, Stephen, becomes a successful and wealthy businessman during his time in America as a foreigner and is exiled only when he returns home. The state of alienation experienced by Sinclair's protagonist is an early fictional representation of Said's contention in *Reflections on Exile* that 'in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional' (185). The prodigal's return home ironically leads to his alienated condition. Julia Kristeva takes the idea of homelessness further in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, in which she claims that the homeless subject 'disseminates on the [...] actor's paradox', and in 'multiplying tasks and "false selves"', the exile 'is never completely true nor completely false' (8).

Alienation thus results in a split sense of being. The main protagonist of Sinclair's story, the ironically named Stephen Lepper, is depicted as a similar fragmented, split being to that in Kristeva's analysis. The disparity between Lepper's outwardly prosperous appearance and the fact that he is travelling third class is emphasised in the advertisement for his journey, an announcement in *The Chicago Central Advertiser* which refers to him as 'Stephen K Lepper, Pork-packing Prince' ('Return' 28). Lepper sees the irony of the description attributed to him, recognising that 'I'm no more like a prince than I'm like a pork-packer' ('Return' 29).

In the return of the prodigal son to his home country, the journey becomes Stephen's idealised vision of a ritual of purification and atonement for his past misdeeds. He sees his increase in fortunes as a means of repaying his

family 'what they'd lost on him, besides making up for any little extra trouble and expense he might have been to them' ('Return' 31). Here the spiritual symbolic imagery is overtly religious.<sup>6</sup> As Lepper is yet to recognise, however, his homecoming represents a day of judgement for his past sins. He idolises the glory of his expected homecoming, long anticipating his journey of the return of the prodigal son; 'I reckon he'll order his own fatted calf – and pay for it' ('Return' 32). This allusion relates Lepper's journey to a spiritual pilgrimage. Its final stage is made on foot and, typically of the journey in the Modernist short story, at twilight.

Down there lay the town, literally buried in the wooded combe. Slabs of grey wall and purple roof, sunk in the black green like graves in grass. A white house here and there faced him with the stare of monumental marble. [...]. He had always thought it very like a cemetery – a place where people lay buried till the Day of Judgement ('Return' 33).

The deathly imagery surrounding the final stage of Lepper's journey may be viewed as symbolically depicting a return home as a journey toward death. Lepper sees himself, the man he had once been, as being dead and buried in the village he observes along his route. This vision equates Kristeva's view of the exiled foreigner with death itself, a shadowy 'other' always already residing within the self, the 'hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder' (*Strangers* 1).

Likewise, Lepper's return journey is equated with death. At the sight of his home village, he imagines himself as 'a glorified Stephen Lepper [standing] up and contemplat[ing] his last resting-place' ('Return' 33-34). However, the deepened sense of piety experienced by returning pilgrims also serves to marginalise them. As Turner has noted, their long absence may serve to set



them back, and if their return necessitates some form of initiation, it is 'a secret, invisible one, not an enhancement of status' (*Pilgrimage* 15).

This contention is demonstrated in Lepper's return when he overhears a conversation between his mother and sisters. Having left them destitute, he learns that they blame him for troubles experienced in the fifteen-year interim between his departure and arrival. His relatives hold him responsible for wrecking one sister's engagement, the other sister's career, and causing his mother's ill health. Lepper's speculation on the spiritual significance of his homecoming is shattered with his relatives' views on his contribution to their ill fortunes. He is also distraught at his mother's response to a question from his sister as to whether she would be glad to see her only son. Although the son's heart yearns, his mother's only response is to say 'I'm a poor weak old woman, and I know that the Lord will not send me any burden that I cannot bear' ('Return' 40).

At this point in the story, Lepper's condition echoes Gurr's observation of the exile's search for identity in which 'the searcher is conscious of his lack of affinity with his time, his place and his history. He is alienated in his own society' (*Writers* 10). This alienation occurs when Lepper leaves his home without being seen, 'back by the way he had come, out of the place where the dead had buried their dead – until the day of Judgement' ('Return' 40). Here Lepper's actions presuppose Kristeva's theory of the stranger, in that the foreigner, 'riveted' to an elsewhere 'as certain as it is inaccessible', is always ready to flee. As Kristeva elaborates, 'he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond' (*Strangers* 5). Like Mansfield's little governess, Lepper continues his journey into the fate of the unknown. Both stories take the pattern of the continual movement of the exile who is 'always ready to resume his infinite journey, farther, elsewhere' (ibid). The condition of

exile, like the condition of modernity, is always that its aims dissipate and deconstruct themselves in what Kristeva calls 'the wanderer's insane stride toward an elsewhere that is always pushed back, unfulfilled, out of reach' (ibid 6).

The metaphor of the journey necessarily fulfils this criterion, particularly in relation to the prevalence of the pilgrimage theme throughout Modernist fiction. In 'The Return of the Prodigal', Lepper's spiritual journey and its relation to death, as well as the theme of the sacrifice made by the women protagonists, all point to a quasi-religious journey which is the condition of the pilgrimage. For Lepper, a journey symbolising ritual purification and atonement for past sins becomes a journey into the unknown. The return of the prodigal to his home becomes a journey into death and judgement.

Lepper's perpetual state of exile in his flights from one place to another plausibly indicates a fear of the liminal state. Ironically, however, it is the act of those flights that keeps him suspended in a state of transition. In Sinclair's story, this becomes a spiritual pilgrimage. Her use of religious symbolism is evocative of death, or what Kristeva calls 'a resurrection that remembers death and what happened before, but misses the glory of going beyond: merely the feeling of a reprieve, of having gotten away' (*Strangers* 7-8). The overlap between the spiritual and secular aspects of pilgrimage is discernible in a rite of passage that unites life with death.<sup>7</sup>

The central metaphor of Katherine Mansfield's story 'The Voyage' (1922), is also the rite of passage in which the literal journey and spiritual pilgrimage converge. The story is heavily reliant upon impressionism and symbolism, and events are typically ordinary whilst embodying elements of the liminal. The only 'plot' contained within the narrative is the departure of a night boat journey shortly after the death of the mother of the main protagonist. As Richardson's 'Tryst' continually posits the opposing entities of inside and outside

against one another, in this story darkness and light are juxtaposed throughout. The outset of the narrative is pervaded with imagery of darkness and blackness, punctuated only infrequently by small areas of light that serve to accentuate it. For instance, in the observation of the protagonist, Fenella, the dark wharf contrasts with the Picton boat that is 'beaded with round golden lights' (CS 323). As the boat departs, Fenella, sees the dark wharf edging away and the strip of water between her old and new life grow 'broader, darker' (CS 323).

In contrast to the images of darkness which characterise the ship's departure, on arrival at its destination it is close to dawn, again a time of transition. At this stage the images of light become more frequent than those of darkness:

the cold pale sky was the same colour as the cold pale sea. On the land a white mist rose and fell. Now they could see quite plainly dark bush. Even the shapes of the umbrella ferns showed, and those strange silvery withered trees that are like skeletons ... (CS 328).

This deathly imagery coincides with Fenella's reflection that life has 'been so sad lately. Was it going to change?' (CS 328). The resuming of her black clothes and the deathly imagery of the scene confronting her at her destination suggest otherwise, yet the journey to her new life and the rite of passage in itself exemplifies change. This implies that rites of passage recur continually and must be negotiated throughout life. The boat journey is one such rite of passage: not merely a night voyage into a changed life, but also a mark of the rites of mourning Fenella must undergo. Darkness symbolises sadness and mourning, with the waters also representing the amniotic fluid and the lost mother.



The sense that this voyage has a greater significance than an ordinary journey unfolds gradually. Fenella is to leave her father to travel with her grandmother and appears disorientated. She is unsure of the reasons for her journey or how long she will be staying. Her father offers no explanation except to hand her a shilling, which leads Fenella to the understanding that 'she must be going away for ever! "Father!" cried Fenella. But he was gone' (CS 323). Unusually, Fenella's father takes off his hat as he leaves them, and she hears her grandma sob: 'God bless you, my own brave son!' (CS 322-323).

The absence of a mother from the narrative and also the emotional nature of the parting between the father and grandmother suggest that Fenella's mother has recently died. Other than hints at the nature of the journey – the absence of the mother, the emotional parting between the grandmother and her son and the black clothes – the only specific reference to the loss is the ship stewardess's reference to Fenella as a 'poor little motherless mite!' (CS 327). The story does not recount the grandmother's explanation of the death to the stewardess, it merely reveals that 'grandma was still telling the stewardess all about what happened when Fenella fell asleep' (ibid).

The notion of the journey as a metaphor for mourning accords with Van Gennep's view of the bereavement process as 'a transitional period for the survivors' (*Rites of Passage* 147). Situated between the worlds of the living and the dead, mourners enter into this state 'through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society' (ibid 146-147).<sup>8</sup> The journey also symbolises a transition from childhood into adolescence. The taboos of death and sex associated with these transitional phases are raised in the scene in which Fenella and her grandmother find themselves in their cabin. It is coffin-like, and Fenella is embarrassed to get undressed in front of grandma: 'It was like being shut up in a box with grandma. The dark round eye above the wash-stand gleamed at them dully. Fenella felt shy. She stood against the door, still

clasping her luggage and the umbrella. Were they going to get undressed in here?' (CS 325-6). Fenella is embarrassed to watch her grandmother undo first 'her bodice, and something under that, and something else under that' (CS 326). As indicated through Grandma's relief as she undoes her stays, the strictures of her layers of clothing are suggestive, not only of what it might be like to have a woman's body, but also of the symbolic constraints placed on femininity. Fenella's first experience of this is another indicator of her rites of passage both through mourning and into adolescence.

The transient state implied by the voyage of the story's title continues after the arrival of the boat at its destination. A continuation of the ship's movement is suggested in the mist that 'rose and fell', the sea that 'still sounded asleep as slowly it turned on the beach' (CS 329), and grandpa's 'rolling tones'. This echoing of the pitching of the boat suggests that Fenella may never regain the stability of the time before her mother's death. It also implies the recurring nature of the liminal rite of passage throughout life. This is echoed in the final image in the story, the text painted by Fenella's grandmother, which again draws attention to the transience of life:

Lost! One Golden Hour  
Set with Sixty Diamond Minutes.  
No Reward is Offered  
For It Is GONE FOR EVER!' (330).

This short text raises the issue of absence, which is significant in the context of lost time. As Liesl Olsen has noted, in Modernist fiction 'somehow "life" must be preserved 'in ice, frozen in time, and moving into a vast ocean where all melts and joins' (Olsen 54). Grandma's text about the lost golden hour points to the artistic paradox it bears within itself: language is both enabling and disabling. In

its naming function it fixes and inhibits, and yet is subject to pluralities of meaning and multiple interpretations. As with typical liminal qualities, language simultaneously imprisons and liberates. In preserving a moment for eternity as a stable, textual entity, the story draws attention to how the freezing of the living moment in time effectively kills it and yet, paradoxically, ensures its immortality.

The connection between the pilgrimage and mortality in Modernist literature is also noted by Astradur Eysteinnsson, who claims that Modernist art is viewed as an 'ordering principle of a quasi-religious kind', a dependable reality amongst the chaos of modernity which is very much a 'fallen world' (Eysteinnsson 9). In other words, Modernist literature is a form of aesthetic heroism in which the spiritual meets the secular. These qualities are also implied in Richardson's sketch 'August', written for the *Saturday Review* in 1912. In this sketch, the month of August is depicted as a fruitful time and a 'threshold' into a newer, richer mature consciousness as opposed to the autumn of existence and possibly the onset of death. The roses have flowered and died but the fruit has yet to ripen, and the state between these two phases offers more possibilities than simply a pathway to death.

Richardson's depiction of the process of ageing and the pathway towards death in her sketch relates to the unity of existence, a central tenet of her thought. As Sheila Rose explains it, in Richardson's aesthetic 'nothing takes the place of any other thing, but each is added to the total, and is available through recollection and reflection' (Rose 169). Like Richardson's other *Saturday Review* sketches 'Strawberries' and 'Gruyeres', 'August' makes an overt reference to a journey on foot towards death:

Shut away in the cool green stillness it was for a moment as if the woodlands, towering unseen above you, were once more welcoming and intimate as they had been in June, when you could [...] step at any



moment from the dusty highway into a tender silence; but this morning when you were still the ceaseless sound of tiny hummings made you an interloper, told you you might, if you pleased, walk through the busy forest, but only by treading out a pathway of death ('August' 142).

The references here to stillness, tender silence, the dusty highway and the pathway of death draw attention to the inexorable progression of life, but are juxtaposed with the cyclical change of the seasons and also to the spaces and silences within the text. The passage is characterised by ellipses and omissions as opposed to a linear movement. In its depiction of a pilgrimage of life in the walk along the pathway to death, 'August' relates to death as inherent within life and art. This strategy pre-empts Derrida's later theory in which he claims that it is only when 'that which is written is *deceased* as a sign-signal that it is born as language; for then it says what is, thereby referring only to itself' ('Force' 12). Derrida's analysis questions the persistent privileging of the closeness and proximity of presence enabled by the spoken word, over coldness, alienation, absence and potential death. Both absence and presence are conditions writing necessarily embodies.

The transition between absence and presence is implied by the notion of the 'autumn' of existence, which is a prevalent theme in Richardson's work. In 'August', the metaphor of late summer denotes a phase beyond youth:

The roses that shone from the crest of the hedge are a memory, and there will be no new honeysuckle; but the downey green of the hedge nuts is pink-flushed only here and there, the stately disks of hemlock are as yet unchanged and honey-full, the nodding blue heads of scabious show no sign of their mauvy old age, and only one in a thousand blackberries is ripe ('August' 142).

Significantly, Richardson wrote of the 'shock of July', of middle age', in the characteristically liminal terms of a 'threshold shock' (Fromm 221). This passage conveys the restrictions and possibilities of middle age. The references to 'memory' and 'old age' contained within Richardson's sketch are depicted in accordance with the passing of the seasons. The roses are a 'memory', but the hemlock, honey-full and the still unripened fruit-berries show the potential for a richness of existence still to come. This demonstrates Richardson's contention that in middle age 'a door is closing behind us and we turn sorrowfully to watch it close and do not discover, until we are wrenched away, the one opening ahead' (Fromm 221).

The image of the door, which relates in Bauman's theory to the open and closed condition of language, suggests a continual play between absence and presence. This characterises not only the liminal state but also the literary text, and is demonstrative of how language embodies the qualities of killing and bringing into being. For Derrida, the act of writing as possessing a 'passion of the origin' is quickly disposed of by the literary text which replaces that origin. In other words, the text 'is not absence instead of presence, but a trace that replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun' ('Ellipses' 295). In this case to have a 'centre', the absence of play and difference (297), entails death.

The paradox of the liminal is therefore inherent in the nature of writing: it liberates and stifles at the same time. This liminal quality is a frequent characteristic of the Modernist sketches and short stories that exploit the play between presence and absence, using liminal metaphors to denote life and death. The metaphor of the pilgrimage suggests life and mortality, and is inherent within the conditions of the written resignification of 'meaning' in itself, no longer following the linear temporality of modified present tenses. As Derrida

phrases it, 'the beyond of the closure of the book is neither to be awaited nor to be re-found. It is *there*, but out there, *beyond*, within repetition, but eluding us there' ('Ellipses' 300). Thus the liminal state cannot, as Turner theorises, be confined to the processual form of the traditional rite of passage. Neither can it be dismissed as an uncomfortable and undesirable movement between stable or secure states of being (*Pilgrimage* 2). The focus of the narrative is the journey itself, not as a means to an end, but a metaphorical rite of passage denoting mortality and the state of existence, of life, and of art.

The journey is a liminal entity in that, as Reader and Walter suggest, it entails travelling 'out of the normal parameters of life [...] into a different, other, world' (*Pilgrimage* 8). Moreover, modernity itself is referred to by Zygmunt Bauman as 'an obsessive march forward' (10), a condition primarily associated with a dissatisfaction with the present. The adventures of modernity are bitter and its ambitions frustrated; 'no place is privileged, no place better than another, as from no place the horizon is nearer than from any other' (10-11). Modernity thus equates to a form of pilgrimage. For Francese, Modernism is also defined as the 'evolution of structures of lived realities, such as subjectivity and identity' (Francese 1), and has a close affinity with the figure of the exile, fragmented by the loss of a sense of place and community (ibid 3). In the Modernist short story, the pilgrimage and its associated state of exile is a metaphor for what Van Gennep refers to as the rite of passage. The pilgrimage is a journey undertaken as an act of religious devotion, a long search or a quest, and in the stories discussed, can represent ordinary, daily life, as well as its significant milestones. These stories also relate to the connection between writing and mortality. The metaphor of the journey as a literal or metaphorical rite of passage is frequently adopted to symbolise these states. In each of the stories, the most noteworthy similarity is in keeping with Bauman's notion of modernity as an 'obsessive march forward'. The arrival remains elusive; the focus of attention is the in-



between place, the liminal. In the Modernist short story, the journey not the arrival matters.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The concept of the journey or pilgrimage resonates throughout numerous canonical Modernist texts. For instance, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has the journey and alienation as its main metaphors, key events being the river journey to the Inner Station, and Kurtz's 'exalted alienation which becomes internalised as self-contempt' (Rawson, 'Modernism and the Savage' 100). Other titles focusing on the journey include Forster's *A Passage to India* and *The Longest Journey*.

<sup>2</sup> Turner defines the state of the ritual subject in the *limen* phase as 'the "passenger" or "liminar"' (*Pilgrimage* 2).

<sup>3</sup> The disorientating effect of a night journey also appears in Mansfield's 'Prelude', in which 'everything looked different – the painted wooden houses far smaller than they did by day, the gardens far bigger and wilder' (CS 16).

<sup>4</sup> Kemp relates this specifically to Julia Kristeva's analysis of feminism in her essay 'Women's Time'; however, it may also be related to the continually recurring theme of liminality in Modernist fiction.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen has observed that in *Pilgrimage*, the main character Miriam Henderson 'recalls her childhood garden whenever she discovers a similarity between a space she currently inhabits and the place of past bliss and safety' (Bronfen 75).

<sup>6</sup> The story is an ironic rewriting of the Biblical Parable of the Lost Son, who squanders his fortune and returns home to be welcomed by his father with a fattened calf (Luke 15:11–22).

<sup>7</sup> Turner also argues that the pilgrimage provides a means of uniting the living with the dead. Often revolving around the tombs of saints and the images of heroes, the pilgrimage operates in this way across a wide variety of cultures, resulting in the preservation of the hero or saintly figure and transcending, 'at least on a spiritual plane, the reality of physical death' (*Pilgrimage* 18).

<sup>8</sup> The journey and death are specifically linked in Mansfield's fiction, in which 'sailing away' is a commonly repeated occurrence and ships are connected frequently with death. Her review of Woolf's novel *Night and Day*, entitled 'A Ship comes into the Harbour' relates to the death of the traditional novel. Likewise, in *Prelude*, the aloe turns into a metaphorical ship in its observer's imagination and bears her away from her family and the biological trap of maternity under which she lives. The deathly imagery surrounding this occurrence implicitly relates it to the Freudian concept of the death drive (see Chapter 7, pages 237–238).

## Chapter 3

### A Society of Outsiders?: War as a Liminal Experience

... it could be called the Outsiders' Society. That is not a resonant name, but it has the advantage that it squares with facts – the facts of history, of law, of biography; even, it may be, with the still hidden facts of our still unknown psychology (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 232).

Virginia Woolf's notion of an 'Outsider's Society' was conceived in her 1920 short story, 'A Society' and later developed in her polemical war essay *Three Guineas* (1938). In both the story and the essay, this theme is imagined in the context of a declaration of war. The motif of an 'anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders' (TG 235) for Woolf enables an interrogation of the ways in which remaining 'outside' society enables a challenge to social injustice, as well as representing a bona fide political stance against violence, tyranny and war. Moreover, in its simultaneous relationship with the subjective space of our 'unknown psychology' and the public spheres of history, law and biography in which the politics of violence are formed, the term Outsiders' Society is complex and ironic. A 'Society' is a micro-organisation of a group of like-minded individuals united in a common cause, but also denotes a wider-scale macrocosm of complex social interaction. To be an 'outsider' in either of these senses is to embrace a liminal condition.

The discourse, imagery and historical circumstances associated with war suggest that war is in itself liminal. The non-space dominating the discourse of World War 1, 'No Man's Land', is an unmistakably liminal image, and the idea of war as a stage of transition in which social boundaries are displaced is commonplace. The former American Ambassador to Britain suggested that war broke down barriers 'that have heretofore been impassable, not only between

men and women, but between the various classes of society' (Joseph H Choate qtd. Gilbert and Gubar 305). Likewise, for Victor Turner 'the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic and unnatural shapes' enables a reassessment of cultural experience previously accepted without question ('Liminal to Liminoid' 73). Choate's and Turner's remarks imply that in its destruction of previously impassable barriers, war is a transitional phase in which the prevailing discourses are contradicted but new ones have yet to be established. Woolf's reference to a 'still unknown psychology' also accords with a state in which the potential for change begins to be realised.

In short fiction by Katherine Mansfield, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf, there is a common association between war and the status of outsider.<sup>1</sup> Rather than examining the actual event of war, their stories focus on its context: the politics of violence which can culminate in conflict, as well as the destructive after effects, through the viewpoint of an outsider. In doing so, the stories draw attention to the liminal status of war, specifically exploiting the potential of these boundaries as opposed to offering a direct critique of war itself. In the context of war, liminality is portrayed in these stories as predominantly negative, although even as it destroys, war can potentially liberate society from genocide and oppression. Eric Leed has noted that a sense of freedom is not uncommonly associated with war and that many veterans found a positive and rewarding side to their experience as combatants. Leed cites the comradeship 'that erased "artificial" social barriers, the sharing of a common destiny, and the equality of condition that transcended rank and even enmity' (Leed, *No Man's Land* 25). Paradoxically, however, liminality frequently manifests itself in the painful psychological states of silence, marginalisation and madness. In the stories



discussed in this chapter, this state of outsiderdom can never be wholly surmounted by its potential for political change.

Modernist short stories about war focus predominantly on two main areas: the politics of violence which can lead to war, and the process of mourning and re-establishing social convention which follows it. In this context, the anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders offers two possibilities. It is a potential tool for resisting tyranny, but is also a means to silence, marginalisation and social exclusion. It can thus be counterproductive, resulting not necessarily in an avoidance of war but a perpetuation of it, encompassing the risk of becoming engulfed in the negative, restrictive aspects of the liminal, as well as its prospects for liberation.

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf treats seriously the notion of a Society of Outsiders as a subversive means of avoiding war and explores the methods through which, in adopting this position, women may take a positive political stance against violence. The 'daughters of educated men', a similar group of women to those who form the 'society for asking questions' in Woolf's short story 'A Society', are urged to give their combatant and pacifist brothers 'neither the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, but no feather at all' (TG 245). The position of the Outsiders' Society is, therefore, to remain aloof; to fight tyranny 'secretly and without arms' just as surely as their combatant brothers fought to uphold these tyrannical values 'with arms in the limelight of publicity' (175). For Woolf, patriarchal tyranny involves women's financial impoverishment and their domestic servitude to men, which works to keep men free to occupy the public arena exclusively. It is in social discourses, Woolf argues, that the seeds of war are sown, and thus a re-evaluation of these discourses is necessary if war is to be avoided.

Even before the publication of *Three Guineas*, Woolf's stance on war consistently earned her a controversial critical response.<sup>2</sup> Katherine Mansfield,

for instance, referred to her novel *Night and Day* as 'a lie in the soul' for its omission of the war (CLKM 3 82). In a review of this book written for the *Athenaeum*, Mansfield makes this point more obliquely in the statement that 'we had thought [...] that it was impossible to find on the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening' ('Harbour' 314). In spite of the measured tone of her publicly expressed views in her review, however, Mansfield privately raged at the attitudes of Woolf and her Bloomsbury circle. She wrote to her husband, John Middleton Murry, that Woolf's novel 'reeked' of intellectual snobbery (*Letters to JMM* 388) and on a further occasion, complained vehemently that 'I despise them all for a set of cowards. We have to face our war - they won't' (CLKM 3 82).

Whilst Woolf took strong exception to Mansfield's review, however, her nephew Quentin Bell was of the opinion that it was 'perceptive and discreet, and by no means unfair to the novel' (Alpers 258). Moreover, Bell himself is amongst the most vocal critics of Woolf's response to war; objecting to her attempts to equate the question of women's rights with 'the far more agonising and immediate question of what we were to do in order to meet the ever-growing menace of Fascism and war' (qtd 'Introduction', *AROO/TG* xl). As the responses of both Mansfield and Bell indicate, the equation of patriarchy with war and genocidal tyranny is difficult to justify. The legitimate criticism of a refusal to 'face our war' might be levied at the issue which Woolf explored in 'A Society' and which would later become the crux of her thinking in *Three Guineas*. The idea at the core of both texts - that a secret and anonymous outsiders' society poses a solution to the problem of tyranny at state and domestic level - is problematic.

'A Society', which is likely to have been written in late 1920, concerns a group of women who set out to explore the society in which they live and from which they believe they have been excluded.<sup>3</sup> Their interrogations span the



largely masculine orientated sphere of public life: business meetings, the courts, a scholar's study, and similar institutions. The society is founded as a response to the assumption that a woman's 'duty' was to spend her youth bearing children. As one character, Clorinda, asserts, 'We have gone on all these ages supposing that men were equally industrious, and that their works were of equal merit' (*HH* 119). The Society is therefore formed 'for asking questions'. Its goal is to scrutinise the claim that 'the objects of life are to produce good people and good books' (*HH* 120), and its members vow not to bear children until they have the answers. Ironically, the 'Society' challenges society, and its outsider perspective merely reinforces its liminal status through its responses to various discursive fields, particularly the judiciary, religion and education.

The suggestion that men's education may not hold the value it purports to hold is interrogated in 'A Society' and later in *Three Guineas*. Woolf writes in the latter that women must of necessity 'differ in some essential respects from [men], whose body, brain and spirit have been so differently trained and are so differently influenced by memory and tradition' (*TG* 132-3). In 'A Society', educational discourse is interrogated through the character of Poll, who is left a fortune in her father's will, but only on the condition that she reads all the books in the London Library. However, Poll's hours of reading in the 'masculine' realms of education and the writing profession lead her only to the conclusion that books were not what she had thought. When war is unexpectedly declared halfway through the story, it is apparent that Poll's intellectual readings have taught her nothing about it. She is able to recall from memory a list of historical wars, but admits 'I don't know what they are going to war for now' (*HH* 128). In the senses of both a microcosm and macrocosm, the Society's lack of understanding about the significant political events surrounding it shows up a weakness in Woolf's position that passive resistance, or remaining aloof and outside, is an empowering political position.



The political radicalism of 'A Society' and *Three Guineas* does, however, demonstrate Woolf's insight into war as an extreme form of social dysfunction. As Mark Hussey has noted, Woolf's war writings imply that this dysfunction 'must be corrected, not on the diplomatic front but in families, churches, and schools' (Hussey 2). In 'A Society', the gender of the protagonists renders them outsiders, in much the same way as Mary Beton, the narrator of Woolf's earlier essay *A Room of One's Own*, finds herself shut out of the Oxbridge university library (*AROO* 7). Woolf's contention that 'it is part of a writer's profession to be an outsider' (*TG* xxvii) is therefore fraught with inherent dangers. In 'A Society', none of the women who visit the public institutions is able to answer the question she sets out to discover. Fanny falls asleep in the Law Courts and receives no answers, whilst Helen is only able to quote poetry and it never occurs to her to ask whether the Oxford Professors produce good people, good books or, indeed, anything at all. Liz is only able to deduce who the popular modern authors are, but has no word to say on whether their books are good or not, only discovering that 'the truth has nothing to do with literature' (*HH* 127). In sharing their answers at a society meeting, the only decisive voice comes from the street outside: 'War! Declaration of war!' (*HH* 127).

To the Outsiders' Society this is incomprehensible and their sojourns into wider society reveal no warnings of imminent conflict. A passive response to the immediate possibility of war is also suggested in *Three Guineas*, in which Woolf asserts that 'to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental' (*TG* 120-1). This proclamation leads Michèle Barrett to the conclusion that Woolf's separation of 'you' from 'us' hints at nothing more than an abdication of political responsibility (Barrett xxxiv). Whilst the Society of Outsiders also suggests a passive mode of resistance to war through the answering of questions surrounding the male domination of the public sphere, it is significant that not

one of the women is able to procure an answer to the question she sets out to investigate. The story implicitly questions the underlying causes of the politics of violence but does not offer any solution other than an outsiders' stance; a position which relegates women to the home.

It is noteworthy that the characters in the story ultimately return to their old roles and begin having children. Castalia confesses to being pregnant as the peace treaty is being signed, and concludes 'if we hadn't learned to read [...] we might still have been bearing children in ignorance and that I believe was the happiest life after all' (*HH* 128). The papers of the now-obsolete society of outsiders are bestowed on Castalia's daughter, who promptly bursts into tears. To occupy the liminal status of an outsider thus supports Barrett's conclusion that the conscious embracing of a position of passive resistance is an abdication of responsibility. It offers no real response either as a resistance to war, or to the oppression of women by men. An outsider stance neither rejects non-involvement in war as cowardly nor embraces active combat as heroic or courageous. The liminal Outsiders' Society is caught between these conflicting positions and is thus a position of powerlessness, which contradicts Woolf's view that remaining 'outside' is necessarily a subversive political stance.

The response to the 'outsiders' dilemma offered by May Sinclair, an avid supporter of the First World War, poses a marked contrast to that of Virginia Woolf. Whilst Woolf's pacifist stance led her to remark that 'the whole of our world does nothing but talk about conscription, and their chances of getting off' (*L VII* 102), Sinclair's 'Journal of Impressions in Belgium', an account of her experiences with Hector Munro's Ambulance Corps, details her opposing views. The journal makes reference to the bureaucracy surrounding the Corps' departure: 'the painful births and deaths of I don't know how many committees' and 'six weeks' struggling with something we imagined to be Red Tape' ('A Journal', 1,168).<sup>4</sup> Amid this bureaucracy, Sinclair wrote of a highly competitive



atmosphere between those wanting to 'get to the front', and a desperate anxiety of 'somebody else getting there too, and getting there first' (ibid). For Sinclair, unlike Woolf, being outside society is a painful indicator of superfluity.

Sinclair's story 'Red Tape' (1914) relates to the discrimination suffered by people wanting to go out to the front on the basis not only of their sex, but also their age and physical capacity. 'Red Tape' is a liminal metaphor, representing a boundary that must physically be cut through in order to bypass official inertia. The origins of the term are obscure, but allude to the 17th and 18th century English practice of binding documents and official papers with red tape. In his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Thomas Carlyle brought the notoriety of red tape to prominence by famously complaining 'against the ineffectuality of what are nicknamed our "red-tape" establishments, our Government Offices' (Carlyle 87). In a later analysis published at the onset of World War II in 1942, J P W Mallalieu analyses the bureaucracy surrounding war and the sea of red tape determining production and control in the Civil Service, which he refers to as the 'clerical class' (Laski 16).

In satirising the red tape that ultimately divides those who will be included in the war from those who remain outside, Sinclair's story shows a similar impatience with committees and bureaucracy to that conveyed by Woolf in *Three Guineas*. 'Red tape' becomes a metaphorical yet literal entity. A tangible image of liminality, red tape is a symbolic boundary that stands between the protagonists and their dreams of achieving heroism through involvement with the war. Moreover, the colour of the tape suggests the bloodshed associated with war as well as the bureaucracy that brings, for the two main protagonists, the painful realisation that they are surplus to requirements.

The story's subplot hints at a romantic attachment between its two main protagonists, and also suggests that their romanticised notions of heroic action at the front are determined by their gendered roles. The story draws stark



attention to the different spheres of expectation for men and women, asserting that going to the front 'was the only way Mr Starkey could serve his country. And it was the only way Miss Delacheroy could serve Mr Starkey' (199). The roles allotted to men and women are represented by the characters of Mr Starkey, who has 'a genius for organisation' and Miss Delacheroy, who has 'a genius for being organised' (199). Mr Starkey views his employee as 'an inconsiderable part of the office furniture – a little machine, shoved aside into its corner; rather the worse for wear and working badly' (199-200). Mr Starkey repeatedly views Miss Delacheroy as a machine, even as he contemplates her as a 'live woman working competently in her corner' (200). The blurring between inanimate machines and living beings is telling in the context of war; which satirises the way in which, particularly in Mansfield's work, human beings are viewed as nothing more than commodities serving national interests.

At the opening of 'Red Tape', the phrase 'they were going' immediately sets the tone for the transitional, 'in-between' state of war. Significantly, the story concerns the liminal phase of waiting as opposed to front-line action, and remains focused on the protagonists' fruitless efforts to get 'to the front'. The story conveys a state of waiting: 'they were ready for the war. They had expected it any time within the last five years' (200). This state of suspension is characteristic of a liminal condition in which the protagonists leave their old lives behind, but are thwarted in their encounters with the red tape that prevents each of them fulfilling their complex aims of service to their country and each other.

In 'Red Tape', the socially constructed public and private domains converge when the ultimatum is declared. Separate gendered spheres merge into a liminal phase of war in which old conventions have been ruptured but new ones have yet to be established. For Mr Starkey and Miss Delacheroy, the ultimatum 'made them do things, vehement and organist things, things they had never done before' (200). The characters' fierce competitiveness in attempting

to get to the front is then satirised as a breaking-down of the previous gender relations. When Starkey declares his intention to go to the front, there stirs within him a 'little creeping ignoble fear' when Miss Delacheroy says she will do likewise (203). Miss Delacheroy is incensed with Mr Starkey when he ensures she fails her White Cross certificate. In her turn, Miss Delacheroy 'scored a point' against Mr Starkey by having herself inoculated against typhoid, a process which takes eight days (205). The race ends abruptly with Miss Delacheroy's admission that 'it all goes through the War Office, and they won't look at you if you're over forty'. Thus age prevents both protagonists from achieving their goals through an entity Mr Starkey calls 'the system' and 'red tape' (209).

Like Woolf's 'A Society', Sinclair's 'Red Tape' is a satire on the bureaucratic social discourses surrounding war. The stories both challenge the politics of oppression on a domestic level and in society, although each writer held a very different view on war. For Woolf, a Society of Outsiders is the means by which war may be resisted through its passive, pacifist response to conflict. For Sinclair, being outside is a negative position occupied by those whose advanced ages and gender render them surplus to society's requirements.

In the Modernist short story, depictions of the liminal state of war reveal an interrogation of the outsider position through a subtle interweaving of state and domestic violence. This is a particular characteristic of Katherine Mansfield's earliest volume of short stories entitled *In A German Pension*. As Lee Garver has pointed out, it is noteworthy that Mansfield played a crucial, if unacknowledged, role in the discrediting and redirection of Edwardian values that subscribed to the German ideal of the family (Garver 231). These stories strongly reject the ideal, suggested in Sinclair's 'Red Tape', that citizens should be regarded as what Lee Garver describes as 'physical specimens, sexual vessels, and national commodities' ('Political KM' 231).<sup>5</sup>



Garver's observation is substantiated by a further distinction made by Mansfield between Edwardian and modern ideals. In her review of *Night and Day*, Mansfield distinguishes between 'two camps' of reviewers. 'Present each camp with the same book', she asserts, 'and from one there comes a shout of praise, from the other a chorus of blame, each equally loud, determined and limited' (312-3). Whilst Mansfield's review offended Woolf in its dismissal of the novel as an outdated mode of representation, the review in some senses pre-empted Woolf's ideas. In her 1923 essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', for instance, Woolf also identifies a divide between two 'camps' of writers: the Edwardians and the Georgians (70).<sup>6</sup> Mansfield's view that the war represented a stark division between old and new art forms is also expressed in a letter in which she wrote that after war, nothing can ever be the same [and] as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise' (CLKM 3 82).

Mansfield's *In a German Pension* stories make a further connection that is later elaborated on by Woolf. They demonstrate in explicit and sometimes brutally shocking terms how violence in the private sphere is related to violence at state level. In spite of her annoyance at Mansfield's implicit criticisms of her snobbishness and evasion of the subject of war in *Night and Day*, Woolf makes a similar connection to the one Mansfield had earlier made between domestic and state violence. In the work of both writers, it is patriarchal ideology that ensures women are kept subordinated owing to the social assumption that they are the only ones capable of carrying out nurturing work. Mansfield challenges and subverts these dichotomies, and her depictions of pregnancy and maternity reveal the means by which society coerces women into the role of nurturers. Like 'A Society', Mansfield's *Pension* stories highlight the language and social mechanisms underlying public and private violence. In both the public and domestic spheres, Mansfield's stories deem these to be political.



Mansfield's position bears a strong similarity to contemporary feminists whose viewpoints on war were centred on women's familial roles and the 'caring' nature of their work as mothers. Ruth Pierson, for instance, wrote of two main factors distinguishing women from organised violence: 'one is women's general exclusion from the formal societal apparatuses of power and coercion. The other is the involvement of most women in motherhood' (205-206). Likewise, in her belief that women 'succumbed during the war to "*passionate nationalism*" just as much as men' (100), the Swedish maternalist Ellen Key claimed the women in these cases had contradicted their true natures as nurturers (ibid). Sara Ruddick has more recently identified a 'politics of peace' which she locates within 'maternal thinking'. A central tenet of this theory is the observation that 'all of women's work - sheltering, nursing, feeding, kin work, teaching of the very young, tending the frail elderly - is threatened by violence' (Ruddick 148). This view has a close affinity with the pacifist stance advocated in Woolf's 'A Society' and *Three Guineas*. Significantly, in 'A Society' Castalia's pregnancy is announced as the peace treaty is signed, implicitly connecting women's maternal role to the 're-aggregation' phase of Van Gennep's rituals of passage, and relating their position outside society to what Ruddick defines as a politics of peace. Mansfield, however, counters this notion of passive resistance in her stories. Her earlier work in particular depicts maternity and the imposition of nurturing roles on women as a form of violation.

This issue is addressed most overtly in the story 'Germans at Meat', which places a strong emphasis on the politics of violence and how these are reinscribed in the human subject. In 'Germans at Meat', repeated threats of 'invasion' are levied by the German male protagonists at the English female narrator. An implicit link is made between colonial and sexual violation when the narrator observes Herr Rat fixing 'his cold blue eyes on me with an expression which suggested a thousand premeditated invasions' (CS 684). The connection

between sexual and colonial invasion is also made through the character of Herr Hoffman, who asserts 'We don't want England. If we did we would have had her a long time ago' (CS 686). The use of the feminine gender in relation to England, echoed in Herr Rat's lascivious gaze at the narrator, suggests the colonial invasion of her country as a symbolic rape.

The German protagonists are depicted as carnivorous predators who gorge themselves on meat whilst professing astonishment at the narrator's vegetarianism and childlessness. The narrator is by contrast silent on the subject of food. She is unable to comment on what her husband's favourite meat is – 'he is not at all particular about his food' (686) – and is able only to comment on the secret of English tea, the warming of the teapot. Even on this point, the narrator is unable to translate, so she remains silent. She is thus doubly marginalised as a woman and a foreigner. Politics of violence on domestic and national levels are suggested through the German characters' voracious appetites, which are implicitly, but not overtly, associated with sexual invasion. The widow, for instance, reflects on a celebratory dinner at which her friend's husband places babies on the table in a representation of fertility and pride in family life (ibid).

The connection between eating and sexual invasion is implicit elsewhere in Mansfield's work. In her stories, eating meat denotes a voracious appetite for something taboo and forbidden. In *Prelude*, for instance, the pregnant mother Linda Burnell fears pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, and strenuously resists her maternal role. In an implicit rejection of her sexual role, she refuses the supper of fried chops eaten by the rest of the family and instead sits to one side with a headache. A similar connection between eating meat and sexual violation is made in 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', in which the chief protagonist refuses the bread and fatty meat her husband eats as he teases her for her 'innocence' on their wedding night. Having later checked on her children,



Frau Brechenmacher is struck by the banal and commonplace tragedy of her marital situation: 'Always the same [...] all over the world the same; but, God in Heaven – but *stupid*' (CS 711).

Retiring to bed to await the expected sexual invasion of her drunken husband, Frau Brechenmacher 'lay down on the bed and put her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt as Herr Brechenmacher lurched in' (CS 711). The story thus follows the model of a satire against the notion of women as commodities serving patriarchy and the politics of violence. This connection is similar to the one Woolf makes in *Three Guineas* between domestic servitude and tyranny on the level of state and international politics. As Garver further points out, Mansfield is deeply critical of what she perceives as the German obsession with the physical and the sexual' (230). This preoccupation with women's maternal, 'nurturing' role serves in her stories as a mode of oppression, and a contributory factor to politics of violence on a national and international scale.

Unlike Woolf, Mansfield rejects the assumption that, in adopting an outsider's stance, women may passively resist the politics of violence. On the contrary, her stories illustrate Ellen Key's view that women as well as men are capable of succumbing to a 'passionate nationalism' in the face of war (100). The relationship between violence, sexual oppression and women's related impoverished status is depicted most strongly in 'The Swing of the Pendulum' (1911), in which Mansfield shows the workings of tyranny and patriarchy in their most extreme forms. The story involves a woman who is disempowered sexually and financially. Harangued by her landlady for unpaid rent, the protagonist, Viola, is forced to depend on men for her survival. Her lover is someone to look after her, protect her from the advances of other men and to 'keep me until my work began to sell' (CS 766). Moreover, her reliance on the generosity of her lovers is related to prostitution, an option Viola is clearly



considering throughout the story. She is 'frightened to go into the streets – she heard of such awful things happening to those women – men with diseases – or men who didn't pay' (CS 768).

Viola's view of men merely as a means of financial survival raises questions concerning the relative poverty of women as opposed to men, and the means by which women's financial impoverishment enables men to exploit them. As Woolf queried in *A Room of One's Own*, 'Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?' (AROO 23). Viola experiences this situation when she contemplates prostitution as a means of 'liberating' herself from her dependency on her lovers. She invites a stranger to smoke a cigarette in her room, but ultimately resists his advances as well as his offer of two hundred marks for a kiss. Viola is caught between financial poverty and physical violence when the story culminates in a brutal rape attempt and shows the extreme disadvantages faced by women in socially impoverished positions. Unable in the end to face prostitution, Viola fights back against her attacker and becomes intoxicated by the violence and her feelings of power where her resistance succeeds. After the stranger's first attempt to force her to kiss him, Viola temporarily gains the upper hand, reflecting that: 'At the moment, when he was not touching her, she quite enjoyed herself. She thrilled at her own angry voice. "To think I should talk to a man like that!"' (CS 772). When he is eventually forced to give up the attack, Viola, despite the 'great red marks' on her arms and the knowledge that she will be bruised, is elated: 'That was her first fight, and she'd won – she'd conquered that beast – all by herself' (ibid).

This stance echoes Key's contention that women as well as men are capable of violence, and refutes Woolf's essentialist view in *Three Guineas* that fighting is the habit of men and not women (TG 120-21), a view Roger Poole rightly describes as an 'intolerable oversimplification' (99). Mansfield does not

convey the essentialist view of men's and women's responses to war explored by Woolf in *Three Guineas*. Nor, unlike Woolf or Sinclair, does she take an overt stance either for or against war in her stories. Her treatment of the outsider position does, however, implicitly criticise the politics of violence and, like Woolf, Mansfield interrogates the relationships between domestic and state violence and war.

This connection is made starkly in Woolf's 1917 story 'The Mark on the Wall', in which, with the onset of war and its overturning of established social boundaries, things that were previously 'real' become what the speaker describes as 'half phantoms' that simultaneously threaten and liberate. The narrator speculates that the 'masculine point of view' is one such phantom governing the social 'which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbins where the phantoms go' (*HH* 80). The discovery that the 'real' things: 'Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses' were not after all entirely real' (*HH* 80), is described as 'shocking but wonderful'. These observations indicate a rupture between old social conventions and the anticipated emergence of new ones, connecting the transition into newly emerging Modernist art forms with the 'space' between past and future social boundaries inhabited by the liminal context of war.

As Helen Simpson has noted, in 'The Mark on the Wall' the 'dragonfly quality' of Woolf's writing is discernible for the first time, 'defying gig lamp chronology, spending a page on an instant then hurtling through several centuries in the space of a paragraph' ('Introduction', *HH* viii). The merging of past, present and future tenses is achieved by a continual disruption of the speaker's reverie as her gaze shifts to a mark on the wall and she speculates on what it might be. In its backward and forward motion of consciousness, the story adopts a similar strategy to the one used by Richardson in 'A Journey to Paradise', in which the usurping of a past, present and future continuum



demonstrates Turner's contention that liminality changes the quality of time ('Liminal' 24). It is noteworthy that Woolf's transcendence of the former ways of presenting space and time appears in a story set in the context of war, and also has the distinction of being the first short story she published.

In 'The Mark on the Wall', there is a palpable reference to mortality. The speaker's observation that 'everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing. There is a vast upheaval of matter' (*HH* 83), conceivably refers not only to the rupture of social boundaries entailed by war but also to life and death. The idea that life is transient, an inexorable progression towards death, is also implied in the pervasive imagery of death and loss in the story. The narrator relates life not only to a transient progression to death but also a series of 'things lost in our lifetime' (*HH* 78). She professes the desire to 'sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts' (79). The suggestion that 'hard separate facts' are merely a surface phenomenon points to a discernible critique of the authenticity of popular accounts of war, which is also conveyed obliquely in the story. A challenge to the veracity of official depictions of war in history and the media is presented when the narrator, her reverie interrupted, experiences a moment of confusion when someone stands over her and announces 'I'm going out to buy a newspaper' (*HH* 83). The speaker merely reflects that 'it's no good buying newspapers ... Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!' (*ibid*). The potential implications of this statement are clarified elsewhere in Woolf's writings, in which she objected strongly to the opinions fed to the public by the propaganda machines of history and the media. The brutality of war was obscured in these publications by a tone of patriotism, in order that public support for the war continued in spite of heavy casualties. In her 1919 review of Metchim's *Our Own History of the War*, Woolf challenges this implication, writing sardonically that



the individuals do the thing, and you in a muddled way reflect what they do in blurred pictures half obliterating each other; little particles of you get somehow broken off and turned into soldiers and sent to France [...] while you in your vast quivering bulk, remain at home ('The War from the Street' 4).

The image of 'blurred pictures half obliterating each other' in this passage conceivably relates to newspaper images and propaganda which conveys a distorted picture of the war to their audiences. This description also suggests that newspapers are an image of liminality: the link between the soldiers in France and the 'vast quivering bulk' of the public. Woolf's review thus questions Metchim's use of the ambiguous term 'our' in his title. Her ultimate conclusion is that 'the history of the war is not and never will be written from our point of view' (ibid 3).

This is an implicit criticism of Metchim's assumption that the term 'our' may be applied in a generic sense to mean a consensus of opinion assigned to everyone who had undergone the experience of war. In 'The Mark on the Wall', the narrator's cursing of the war finds a likely explanation in Woolf's review of Metchim. The review objects strongly to official versions of war that assume their readers are 'nothing but a vast receptacle for the rumours of other people's opinions' ('War from the Street' 4). Given this critique of the veracity of news reporting and historical accounts concerning war, the phrase 'nothing ever happens' also conceivably relates to an omission of true events from official reports.

The narrative in 'The Mark on the Wall' thus hints that looking for facts in a written medium will yield no 'truth'. The connection between emptiness and writing is made in the story with the juxtaposition of the image of the newspaper with overt references to death and burial; a state in which, 'after life', consists of

The slow pulling down of thick green stalks so that the cup of the flower, as it turns over, deluges one with purple and red light. Why, after all, should one not be born there as one is born here, helpless, speechless, unable to focus one's eyesight, groping at the roots of the grass, at the toes of the Giants [...] There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark.... (HH 78).

The depiction of a burial, 'at the roots of the grass' in a situation 'after life' raises questions about silence, liminality and death. Woolf's description is reminiscent of burial alive. This is significant given that, according to Leed, this nightmare haunted many combatants after the war. Leed further notes that in war death ceased to be an abstraction, becoming instead 'a term defining the growing distance from which the combatant viewed his home. It described the sense of total isolation from "the external world", a sense that is most intensified in the experience of living burial' (Leed 23). The notion of a 'living burial' is a palpably liminal image connecting the returning combatant to a failure in the 're-aggregation' process. Moreover, there is a metaphorical connection between the liminal status of the returning soldiers and the juxtaposition of the images of the newspaper – a 'barrier' between war and propaganda - and the living burial. These images implicitly connect the fate of the combatant to the 'reality' of the war experience being literally 'buried' by the media.

The metaphor of being buried alive may also be applied to soldiers who returned from the war to find themselves marginalised, whether their wounds were psychological or physical. A tangible reminder of the falsity of accounts propagated in the media and histories of war, was the segregation of returned combatants. Their marginalisation served the interests of the dominant power in its endeavours to separate the received version of war from its stark realities.

According to Leed, 'men issuing from the dark door of war are normally characterised as "silent", and this silence might be a mask for bitterness or "secrets"' (Leed 32). Likewise, in his article 'Some Soldiers', Charles Edmund Carrington wrote that he and his generation were 'still an initiate generation, possessing a secret which can never be communicated' (qtd Panichas, *Promise of Greatness* 157). The nightmare of burial alive has a particular significance here, in that the notion of an incommunicable secret appears to suggest the burial of trauma within the psyche. Another aspect of this gulf is the division within the self. The 'hidden facts of our still unknown psychology' are a key domain of Woolf's society of outsiders. The 'outsider' states of madness, homelessness, silence and superfluity outside society, are an important aspect of literary Modernism, which frequently depicts the wounds of war as psychological.

This silent and marginalised status is the condition of the character of Septimus Warren Smith in Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Haunted by the figure of a comrade who was killed in action, Smith struggles with madness caused by shell shock and ultimately commits suicide. The doctors who treat his condition represent medical discourse and the dominant discourses of society in general, which work to mould subjectivity into the preconceived forms of 'normality' dictated by society. Having ascertained that he has served with distinction in the war, and has no financial worries, the doctors are unable to account for his illness. These authority-figures will not entertain Septimus's memories of war and insist that the way to mental health is routine and conforming to the expectations of society. The general practitioner, Holmes, whose name is a play on 'home', initially denies Smith's condition by asserting that 'there was nothing whatsoever the matter' (100), although the eventual diagnosis is 'complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage' (*Mrs Dalloway*, 106).



Septimus' state is largely caused by his difficulty reintegrating himself into society after being in the hinterland of war. Still haunted by images of marginality, his condition demonstrates Leed's contention that the veteran is a man fixed in passage, a wandering nomad never arriving at a destination and thus acquiring a peculiar 'homelessness'. This is suggested in *Mrs Dalloway* in Holmes' impression of Smith as an outcast 'straying on the edge of the world' (103). In the altered relations between the returned soldier and the changed home that awaits him, the liminality of war is not resolved but reenacted. As Leed argues, 'it was the failure of any reaggregation that continued to make the war experience problematic to the veteran, and the veteran himself an ambiguous and potentially dangerous figure to his society' (Leed 33). An equivalent is Kristeva's notion of a subject in whom the abject exists as 'a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), *situates* (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing' (*Powers* 8). The returning combatant is an outsider; an abject being who occupies a powerless position in the complex and altered social relations brought about by the liminal state of war.

This nomadic, liminal position, literally an anonymous status of being outside society', is also a wider-scale consequence of war as noted by Mansfield in her observation that, after war, 'nothing can ever be the same' (*CLKM* 3 82). Her story 'The Fly' (1922) examines the consequences of violence and tackles the predicament of the liminal outsider on various levels: the mourning of a son killed in combat, the power relations and politics which can lead to war, and the devastating effects of war in general. The story is strongly symbolic, relating to the apparently trivial incident of a 'boss' drowning a fly which falls into his inkpot. Once the fly finishes the laborious task of cleaning itself, the boss 'had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop' (*CS* 417). The cycle is repeated until the fly dies, in spite of the

boss's professed admiration for the 'plucky little devil' and his 'never say die' spirit (ibid). This scene is reminiscent of the figure of O'Brien in George Orwell's satirical dystopia *1984*, turning on the electric current and inflicting gratuitous suffering on the hero Winston and stopping it at will, in order to assume total control over the fate of another being. The boss's behaviour toward the fly is similar, illustrating the violence underlying totalitarian politics, the oppression of others and the wielding of power which can culminate in war.

In 'The Fly', neither the father, nor his son who has been killed in combat and for whom he is unable to grieve, is named. The father's immediate grief is focused on the fact that his business aspirations for his only son have died with him. The boss reflects on how he could have 'slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years without the promise for ever before him of the boy's stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off' (CS 416). Referred to simply as 'the boss', this term is sufficiently impersonal for him to be symbolic of the wider mechanisms of power operating concurrently within society: the discursive fields of the media and the family, for instance, or the greedy, manipulative factors of state politics, money, control, and power.

The boss surrounds himself with symbols of the power of dominant discourses in the public sphere: a newly refurbished office, new carpet, new furniture and heating. He alludes to these when conversing with his visitor, Woodifield (CS 413). By contrast, Woodifield is retired and no longer in a position of power: 'since his ..... stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday' (CS 412). The fact that ill-health mainly confines Woodifield to his home equates the character with the powerless situation of the son and the fly. Moreover, the coffin-like imagery of Woodifield's situation of being 'boxed up' is suggestive of death. There is a continual struggle to maintain power within the story. At the outset, power resides with the boss. However, equilibrium is restored when Woodifield refers



to their shared bond: the death of both their sons in combat and the fact that his daughters had visited both their graves. This revelation has a profound effect on the boss, who receives a terrible shock 'exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him' (CS 415).

In 'The Fly', hints at transience and the uncompleted cycle of war mourning are conveyed through a series of confrontations with death: the reopened coffin, the photograph, and the repetitive action of ink dropped on the fly. The story is not set in the immediate aftermath of war as indicated in the Boss's contemplation of the photograph of his son, which is 'not new. It had been there for over six years' (CS 413). The rite of mourning is thus linked to the liminal conditions of war. In both situations, the normal social barriers are overturned. As theorised by Elisabeth Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body*, in times of social stability, the symbolic rituals surrounding death are sharply defined. Bronfen develops Robert Hertz's model of double burial rites in her theory that a social ritual of symbolic death follows biological death, and the period in between is a liminal phase that blurs these two categories (103). Luckhurst elaborates on this theory, arguing that 'the memorial image is the closing seal on the coffin, the safe passage from absented body (soma) to its re-presentation in memorializing symbols (sema)' (Luckhurst 247). In times of social instability, however, this process is frequently disrupted. As symbolised by the open coffin in 'The Fly', mourning the war dead is a transient process that is never resolved.

This process illustrates Abraham and Torok's contention in their study *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, which relates to blocked or 'impossible' mourning.<sup>7</sup> In their analysis Abraham and Torok develop Freud's notions of melancholia – 'abnormal' or blocked mourning – as a psychic encryptment of the lost other within the self. The elusive metaphorical 'crypt' carved out within the ego when this occurs has the capacity to disguise and to



hide, 'but also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds' ('Foreword' to *Magic Word* xiv). The metaphor of the crypt obviously relates to death, silence, marginality and liminality. The ego contains and metaphorically 'keeps alive' the corpus/text, a body of words, as well as the cadaver of the other. Furthermore, according to Derrida, the crypt itself is, like the wounds of war, *built* by violence' ('Foreword' to *Magic Word* xv).

The tensions between possible and impossible mourning are rooted in a subject's ability, or lack of ability, to incorporate the lost loved object into the ego. As Derrida argues, a 'possible' mourning would interiorise the image of the dead other, whereas an impossible mourning 'refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism' (*Mémoires* 6). In 'The Fly', the sudden violent rupture, a literal reopening of the son's crypt, together with the photograph which has been on his father's desk for as long as six years, indicates a possible blockage in the mourning process. This encompasses a state of 'abnormal' mourning which, in Mansfield's and Woolf's work, is a common condition of mourning the war dead.

Significantly, Derrida describes crypt-formation as a process of 'track[ing] down the path to the tomb' followed by the violation of a sepulchre ('Foreword' to *Magic Word* xxxv). This process is literally reenacted in 'The Fly'. The boss's grief for his dead son culminates in his reestablishing his own power through the killing of the fly. As Freud suggests, similar feelings to those experienced in mourning a loved person may be evoked as a response to 'the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on' ('Melancholia' 1). The fly thus becomes a metaphor, not only for the dead son, but a generation of lost soldiers. The cycle of repetition and power struggles is clearly evident throughout the story, the boss maintaining equilibrium by attempting to reassert his subjectivity within society, through violence and through maintaining his position of economic power. This

demonstrates Abraham and Torok's contention that 'cryptic internalisation' is a parasitic inclusion, which 'can only maintain in a state of repetition the mortal conflict it is impotent to resolve' ('Foreword' to *Magic Word* xvi). Thus the blocked mourning state hovers in a condition of liminality.

Ironically, it is the cycle of mourning and the reestablishing of power that the Boss undergoes, which literally 'keeps alive' the conditions that lead to war. The 'grinding feeling of wretchedness' which overpowers the boss when the fly finally dies is ambiguous (CS 418). It relates to a reinforcement of violent politics through the wielding of power, and also to the en-masse mourning which occurs with war for a social as well as a subjective psyche. This question is addressed in a similar vein by Luckhurst's article 'Impossible Mourning', which examines the social assumption that mourning requires a set of 'reiterable social rituals'. The rituals themselves are apt to change in accordance with cultural change. Necessarily, war brings about this situation through its liminal condition, as genocide involves 'not simply the destruction of people, but of culture' (247). This process is conveyed not only subjectively but also in the collective sense of a nation's wounded psyche. 'The Fly' conveys the uncompleted state of mourning defined by Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia' as melancholic or 'abnormal' mourning. The continual remembrance of the war dead re-enacts a process that is never completed, and thus amounts to a state of 'impossible mourning'.

The issue of mourning the war dead is also addressed obliquely in Woolf's impressionistic story, 'Kew Gardens'. In its displacement of human beings in a Freudian sense of the uncanny, 'Kew Gardens' may conceivably be read as a ghost story, as well as a memoriam to the war dead.<sup>8</sup> The ghostly effect of the story is associated with the sentiments underlying the mentality of war. The supernatural merges with the mechanisms of politics, war and progress, suggesting how individuals, and society's collective unconscious by



implication, are haunted by the momentous events of death, destruction and mourning. As Julia Briggs has argued, after 1914 the nightmare depicted in the horror story genre was no longer of unknown worlds within 'but of scientific, even futuristic horrors', and the realisation that 'man had used science to create a hell for himself' (*Night Visitors* 166-7). In 'Kew Gardens', the traditional 'supernatural' story intersects with the horrors of war.

The oblique prose of 'Kew Gardens' has the effect that, as Freud puts it, 'the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced' ('The Uncanny' 345). The depiction of the protagonists blurs their tangible, physical presence with a shimmering, evanescent quality in which 'at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere' (*HH* 89). This ghostly quality is further enhanced by a sense of 'haunting' by the ghosts of the recent past. A pair of men walking in the gardens spot 'widows! Women in black' walking in the distance (*HH* 86). The widows are a palpable reminder of the war dead, and the sight of them inspires the older man to contemplate that 'Heaven was known to the ancients as Thessaly, William, and now, with this war, the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like thunder' (*HH* 86). This is one of the few overt references to war within the story, although the ghosts of war constantly haunt the text through suggestion. Alice Stavely has observed that the reference to Thessaly is an attempt 'to rationalise the enormous loss of life by invoking the spirit of the Greeks' ('Conversations' 38 & 55).<sup>9</sup> Stavely suggests that there is 'a slight suggestion that the older man's delusions mime responses to war trauma' (*ibid*), making the man an obvious prototype for the tormented Septimus Warren Smith in Woolf's later novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Connections are hinted at between past and present, memory and reverie, and the ghosts of the past in 'Kew Gardens' offer a sense that the secure past is embodied in the present, as the present would become a part of



the future. The story thus conveys that states of liminality, literal death and the death knell of progress are intrinsic to war. As Bauman has described it, this is characteristic of Modernity in which the present is 'obsolete before it comes to be'. The enjoyment of the present lasts for merely a fleeting moment; beyond that, as Bauman puts it, 'the joy acquires a necrophilic tinge, achievement turns into sin and immobility into death' (Bauman 11).

Bauman's observation provides an apt description of both the pitfalls and subversive pleasures associated with liminality, as well as its fleeting nature. This is implicit in the merging of past, present and future experienced differently by members of the first family to appear in 'Kew Gardens'. Lost in their own memories, the characters have a ghost like appearance and appear emblematic of traditional patriarchal society. The order of patriarchy is observed precisely: the man is six inches in front of the woman and whilst the husband, Simon, is immersed in memories of a rejection of his marriage proposal in the past, the woman is preoccupied with supervising the children. Unknown to Simon, however, Eleanor's thoughts are also centred on her past 'ghosts' which constitute 'one's happiness, one's reality' (HH 85). As in various Modernist short stories – 'Journey to Paradise' and 'A Mark on the Wall', for example – past, present and future converge in a liminal state in which the woman's thoughts subvert social restrictions through memory. The 'ghostliness' of the past associated with the family is emphasised as they pass out of sight past the flower-bed, 'now walking four abreast, and soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs in large trembling irregular patches' (HH 85).

As well as its emphasis on the past through a 'haunting' by memories, 'Kew Gardens' also relates to the future, in a merging of past and presence which denotes the space of the garden and the story itself as, like Richardson's story of 'The Garden', embracing a condition of liminality. The story is

continually evocative of progress and the modern world enveloping the tranquil scene at Kew Gardens. The ghosts and memories haunt the text as 'voices, yes, voices, wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly'. However, as indicated by the grind of progress surrounding Kew, there is no silence to be broken as

all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud ... (HH 89).

Moreover, even nature is strictly ordered in accordance with humankind's appreciation of it. Kew Gardens is a neatly cultivated area rather than a wilderness. Occasionally nature and human-imposed order intertwine, as with the neat order in which the protagonists appear and the 'mechanical' movement of the thrush (HH 89). In the blurring of the distinction between nature and culture, past and present, and life and death, 'Kew Gardens' is a commentary on a present that is haunted by both past and future: the war, and the grind of industrial progress. The imagery of death pervades these distinctions, as demonstrated in the observation that 'all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless [...], but their voices went wavering from them, as if they were flames, lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles' (HH 89). War entails a waste of human life, and thus the liminal condition of war and death is abject. If, as Bauman claims, modernity is about the production of order then ambivalence is *'the waste of modernity*. Both order and ambivalence are products of modern practice; and neither has anything except modern practice - continuous, vigilant practice - to sustain it' (Bauman 15). In other words, Modernism is in itself a transient state, and its treatment of war, a quintessential liminal entity, offers an insight into how war contributed to the development of



the experimental forms and techniques of Modernism. Each relates to dissatisfaction with the present, combined with a simultaneous horror of and nostalgia for the past.

Woolf's story 'Solid Objects' (1918), whilst containing a discernible critique of the politics of violence and combat, implicitly relates war to the development of the artistic sphere of Modernism. This strategy has also been noted by Bill Brown, who claims that through its intricate examination of the relations between objects and the world, 'Solid Objects' bears witness, 'to the political economy of Great Britain during and immediately after World War I' ('The Secret Life of Things' 4-5). Like 'Kew Gardens' and Mansfield's *In a German Pension* stories, 'Solid Objects' refers to the war in an oblique sense and conveys a critique of the relation between aesthetics and politics. A major catalyst in the rupture between the professions of politics and the arts in 'Solid Object' is war: a characteristically liminal set of historical circumstances. As Ellmann and Feidelson have noted, Modernism in itself implies historical discontinuity, coinciding with 'the rupture constituted by war with the past', and evoking what Henry James referred to as an 'imagination of disaster' (*Modern Tradition* vi). The title 'Solid Objects' is ironic in this context. Rather than a concern with the solidity implied in the title, the story depicts the fluidity of objects in relation to their surroundings. Each object in the story relates to the whole in a form of artistic intertextuality suggested in Woolf's memoirs *Moments of Being*; that 'the whole world is a work of art [and] we are parts of the work of art' (MB 72). The way in which human subjects interact with the objects in the story is evident in the ways in which John saves the piece of glass and his ambitious colleague, Charles, throws the flat stones away. John's first find is 'a full drop of solid matter', a piece of glass worn smooth by the sea. The glass embodies the liminal possibilities of war, suggesting what the object has been, what it is, and the possibilities for what it could become in the future. The



characteristic merging within one entity of past, present and future states identifies the object as liminal. The glass is described in intricate detail with a focus on how a seemingly solid object is in fact a shifting, changing entity:

so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape, so that it was impossible to say whether it had been bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a precious stone. You had only to enclose it in a rim of gold, or pierce it with a wire, and it became a jewel; part of a necklace, or a dull, green light upon a finger (*HH* 97).

The title 'Solid Objects' thus presents a paradox: objects, whilst apparently solid and uncompromising, are shifting entities. The glass is not an unchanging, static lump of matter, but has been worn smooth, shaped and reshaped by water. In a similar sense, the fluidity of objects and matter relates to their shifting connections with the objects around them; as the 'Mark on the Wall' narrator suggests, 'everything's moving [...] there is a vast upheaval of matter' (*HH* 83). In a further irony, human shapes appear in the story as indistinct, inanimate and objectified, whilst the objects appear as almost living forms. The first image, the small black spot which gradually comes into focus as the forms of two men, is indistinct, whilst the abandoned pilchard boat is endowed with bodily attributes and depicted as more 'alive' than the figures approaching it:

As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenuity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakeable that it was composed of two persons of two young men (*HH* 96).

Here, the boundary between human subjects and material objects is blurred; as occurs in the suggestion that 'any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it' (ibid 98). The relationship between objects and their surroundings is also implied in John's desire to possess fragmented objects rather than whole ones, which raises wider questions regarding the confines of the text. The remainder of the story involves John's gradual rejection of his political life and his progressive immersion in the world of art and objects. The finding of the glass is the catalyst for his starting to 'haunt the places which are most prolific of broken china, such as pieces of waste land between railway lines, sites of demolished houses, and commons in the neighbourhood of London' (ibid 99).

There is a strong emphasis on the star-shaped piece of china John adds to his findings, and on how the fragment came to be. As John muses, 'china is seldom thrown from a great height; it is one of the rarest of human actions. You have to find in conjunction a very high house, and a woman of such reckless impulse and passionate prejudice that she flings her jar or pot straight from the window without thought of who is below' (ibid 99). Wanton acts of destruction are again associated with war, and similarly to Mansfield's *In a German Pension* sequence, violence pervades 'Solid Objects' through suggestion. The passage in which the pot is hurled out of the window is full of images of violence: the demolished houses, the 'passionate prejudice' which can inspire such acts of violence, and the commonplace 'trifling domestic incidents' (ibid) in which pieces of china become broken.

For Woolf, domestic tyranny also has wider-reaching implications as she makes explicit in her connection between fascism and patriarchal oppression in *Three Guineas*. The piece of broken china has a further importance to the story:

it is John's desire to own this object which causes him to miss his meeting, and thus initiates the waning of his involvement in politics. The liminal phase between the end of John's political career and his entry into a new and implicitly more profound dimension of art is significant. It also reflects the shifts taking place in the art forms of the early twentieth-century. The content of 'Solid Objects' implies a rupture between the traditional styles of the past and a new era of artistic experimentation. John's final rejection of the masculine sphere of politics is a further testimony to Woolf's contention that being a writer entails, of necessity, being an outsider (*TG* xxvii).

Woolf's anonymous and secret society of outsiders may thus be seen to have multiple meanings. It relates to a state outside the social, a society at war and a change in the circumstances surrounding the emergence of literary Modernism in the context of the two World Wars. An exploration of the literary and historical context surrounding Mansfield's, Sinclair's and Woolf's experimental short fiction illustrates the duality of a historical and social transition that overturns hitherto accepted conventions and offers the possibility of new ones, even as it destroys established social structures and identity. In this characteristic in-between state, war embodies the liberating and annihilating qualities of the liminal: a pervasive tension in Modernist short fiction.

The outsiders' society is both a tool of opposition to social conventions and a means of being excluded from them into silence, marginalisation, psychosis or death. In the stories of these three writers, the liminal status of war is depicted as overwhelmingly negative, embodying the most violent and destructive aspects of the liminal double bind. Woolf's notion of a 'Society of Outsiders' risks becoming trapped in the threatening liminal realm. Ironically, a pacifist stance may in itself perpetuate the politics of violence - as Mansfield's attitude to maternity in 'Germans at Meat' illustrates - and risks becoming oppressed by the horrors of tyranny, war and oppression that it seeks to resist.



The passive resistance of 'outsider' thus has problems as a tool of liberation from the politics of violence. The stories discussed in this chapter reveal an affinity with the view later articulated by Judith Butler that 'there is an "outside to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute "outside", an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse' (*Bodies that Matter* 8). Therefore, Woolf's view of an anonymous and secret society of outsiders, in both senses of the term 'society', is never other than problematic. Whilst liminal states are potentially liberating, it is not possible to embrace an 'outsider' position as a permanent solution to the problems of tyranny, oppression and war.

The dangers inherent in the liminal condition imposed by war threaten to trap those outside society in a psychotic state taking myriad possible forms: the condition of impossible mourning, metaphoric live burial, silence, madness, marginalisation or, ultimately, death. Yet the historical shifts only liminality can bring about offer the possibility of changing previously rigidly adhered-to categories: politics and domesticity, public and private social domains and potentially, also, 'women' and 'Modernism'.

The Modernist liminal aesthetic developing in the unique set of historical circumstances surrounding the two World Wars, suggests how this transient overturning of previously established social hierarchies played a vital role in the rupture of the Modernist genre from traditional, realist forms. In the short story, the liminal status is perhaps an inevitable theme in the context of this most subversive and innovative of literary eras, the transition between the 'old' and the 'new'.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The focus on this connection in the Modernist short story suggests a broader scope of early twentieth-century war writing than, for example, memoirs or the work of soldier-poets. Trudi Tate's introduction to her edited volume of war short fiction entitled *Women*,

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*Men and the Great War*, makes the case for a broader scope of war literature than 'eyewitness' accounts of combat. She does, however, caution against dividing the genre down a gender polarity and viewing women's war fiction as 'a unified group, requiring special pleading' or 'an unproblematic category for organising knowledge' (Tate 2).

<sup>2</sup> Woolf responded to letters from several admirers who had written to compliment her on the book, but was disappointed by the negative reactions of her family and friends. See letters to Ethel Smyth, (L 6, 234), Viscountess Rhondda, (ibid 236), A G Sayers, (ibid, 238), Shena, Lady Simon (ibid 239).

<sup>3</sup> Woolf noted in her diary at this time that she was compiling a paper in response to Arnold Bennett's adverse views on women (*HH n* 293).

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Raitt's biography *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* includes an account of Sinclair's war experiences. Women could not enlist as soldiers but could get to the front by training as nurses or VADs. Already too old at 51 years of age to train, Sinclair joined the Ambulance Corps, Raitt speculates, through providing its initial funding. Throughout her seventeen-day duty she performed various roles, including packing for the commandant, assisting doctors, stretcher-bearing, and nursing the wounded. In mid-October, she was sent back to England under the ruse of obtaining additional funds for the Corps and Munro requested the War Office not to allow her to rejoin them (Raitt 147-181).

<sup>5</sup> Garver elaborates on this point with the claim that *In A German Pension* initiated a closely related shift from an influential Edwardian aesthetics of materiality and discursivity toward a new Modernist aesthetics of spiritual liberation and perceptual immediacy ('Political KM' 226).

<sup>6</sup> Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy are equated with traditional Edwardian values and writing forms, whilst Forster, Eliot, Strachey and Joyce, the 'Georgians', fall into the Modernist 'camp' (70). Garver has also noted that 'long before Woolf's celebrated 1919 essay "Modern Fiction" took Bennett and Wells to task for being "materialists" concerned more with the "body" than the "soul", Mansfield's tales offered a comparable critique in more specifically political terms' ('Political KM' 234).

<sup>7</sup> This text, in Nicholas Rand's view, was the outset of a major sequence of texts involving Freud's patient, Sergei Pankeiev, referred to as 'The Wolf Man'.

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Freudian uncanny, see Chapters 2 and 6.

<sup>9</sup> Stavely's argument in her essay 'Conversations at Kew' suggests that 'Kew Gardens' was the short story in which Woolf begins to 'say something in my own voice', and in which she found her way out of the traditional narrative style of her novel *Night and Day* and experimented with the techniques of high Modernism. In this sense, the story was for Woolf an important transition from traditional writing forms into the style of writing she wished to perfect.



## Chapter 4

### Between Two Worlds: The Modernist 'Inner Life' as Liminal Discourse

In Dorothy Richardson's short story 'Sunday', the words of the central character are described as 'a bridge thrown towards nothing' (*JP* 28). This is not an isolated use of the bridge as a metaphor for language in Richardson's work. The critic Stephen Heath has noted that her novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*, is permeated with images of 'bridges and catchwords' (218). This is significant given the status of the bridge as a connecting mechanism between two places or states. It is thus a typical liminal image, and its use as a metaphor for language draws attention to the liminal nature of language itself. Significantly, Zygmunt Bauman has noted that 'through its naming/classifying function, language posits itself between a solidly founded, orderly world fit for human habitation, and a contingent world of randomness' (Bauman 1). In its in-between status, language functions as a linking mechanism – a metaphorical bridge - between ordered and random worlds.

It is no accident that this metaphor occurs repeatedly in *Pilgrimage*, one of the longest examples of the Modernist psychological novel. It is less commonly noted, however, that the short story, whilst apparently an antithesis to the lengthy experiments in psychological prose in the novel, was also a form in which the 'inner life', as it came to be known, featured prominently. This chapter examines language as a bridging mechanism between consciousness and its textual representations in the Modernist short story, and suggests that the 'inner life' is a locus of the liminal. The stories I discuss interrogate the boundaries between internal and external 'realities', between conscious and unconscious levels of experience, and between order and chaos, enabling a questioning of limits on various levels of consciousness and social behaviour, and their fictional representations. The Modernist representation of the inner life, as Bauman's



analysis indicates, is posited between worlds and forms a bridging mechanism between the world of order, structure and language, and the world of marginalisation, psychosis and unintelligibility.

According to Heath, Richardson's observation of language as a surface 'made up of bridges and catchwords', demonstrates 'a whole world of inevitable misrepresentation' (218). Modernist fiction in general demonstrates the impossibility of any true linguistic representation of consciousness. It is an antithesis of realism, which attempts to convey apparently 'authentic' duplications of experience through language. The shift from the panoramic, all-encompassing lens of classic realism to Modernist representations of the spectrum of a character's inner life occurred with the use of a range of literary devices such as sensory perception, symbolism, subliminal thoughts, and the attempt to present silent, unarticulated speech in a textual form. This shift was noted by May Sinclair in her interview on 'The Future of the Novel', in which she stated that the traditional novelists, whilst working from the inside of their characters, 'have also always been the outside spectator'. This position invariably interfered with the 'direct presentation' of the subject. The modern novelist, on the contrary, 'should not write about the emotions and the thoughts of his characters. The words he uses must be the thoughts - be the emotions' (Future 477-8).

For the Modernists, the representation of consciousness thus entailed a depiction of 'reality', ironically, as 'unreality'. In the short stories the depiction of the inner sanctum of the mind is invariably a misrepresentation. Language is capable of conveying only a textual equivalent of the rhythms, flux and nuances of the mind. A full representation of the inner life is impossible to attain, therefore what is produced in Modernist interpretations is a linguistic representation of a wide and frequently inaccessible spectrum of consciousness, some of which is presented as subliminal, unacknowledged, or at the periphery

of thought and perception. The newly emerging writing styles experimenting with the inner life were attempting to create in text something incapable of being verbally articulated or fully reproduced through a textual equivalent.

According to the Modernists, however, an exploration of a character's inner life enabled a closer representation of 'reality' than was attainable through traditional narrative modes. The depiction of the inner life was a method the Modernists frequently used in their project of getting 'beneath the surface', as Virginia Woolf advocated in a review of Richardson's *The Tunnel* (16). The aesthetic aim of capturing the essence of a 'reality' behind appearances and below surfaces was shared by Richardson, who also stressed the importance of achieving a new 'independently assertive reality' in fiction ('Foreword', *Pilgrimage* 10) and Sinclair, who asked 'what, if anything, lies behind or at the bottom of multiplicity and change' (*Defence of Idealism* 344). For these writers art, if it probed deeply enough into surface appearances, was the medium through which this profound reality might be glimpsed, if only momentarily.

As the critic Robert Humphrey has noted, this mode of representation involved

a complete or near complete disappearance of the author from the page, with his guiding "he said"s and "he thought"s and with his explanatory comments. [...] In short, the monologue is represented as being completely candid, as if there were no reader (*Consciousness* 25).

The Modernist writers adopted a variety of formal stylistic techniques to achieve this objective. A form used frequently by Katherine Mansfield is free indirect discourse, in which the voice of a third-person narrator converges seamlessly with the depicted character through various devices such as shifts in pronouns, adverbs, tense, and grammatical modes. As M H Abrams points out, this style

has the effect of a movement, or 'hovering', between the direct narrated reproductions of these events 'as they occur to the character and the indirect representation of such events by the narrator' (Abrams 169). The effect of 'hovering between' is significant in view of Mansfield's frequent use of the technique to depict the characteristic transient, in-between state of the Modernist inner life.

Another technique used commonly for representing the inner life was the stream of consciousness narrative. This technique has its origins in the writings of psychoanalysis and was often referred to contemporaneously as psychological prose. The first use of the label 'stream of consciousness' in a literary context was in 1918, when May Sinclair 'borrowed' it from William James's *Principles of Psychology* to designate Richardson's narrative technique in *Pilgrimage*. Sinclair's review, published in *The Egoist* in April 1918, follows James's view that subjective consciousness is insufficiently described by words such as 'chain' or 'train': it is 'nothing jointed; it flows' (James qtd Ellmann & Feidelson 717). James therefore arrived at a river or a stream as a more appropriate metaphor for consciousness and subjective life.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'stream of consciousness' nonetheless poses some complex problems of definition. Richardson herself was amongst the most strident objectors to it, calling Sinclair's use of the metaphor 'more than lamentably ill chosen', and complaining that 'no authority of whatever eminence' should have persuaded her to regard consciousness as a stream ('Novels' 433). Alternatively, Richardson suggested a tree or a fountain as more appropriate metaphors for consciousness because 'its central core, its luminous point, (call it what you will, its names are legion) tho more or less expanding from birth to maturity, remains stable, one with itself thruout life' ('Novels' 397; Kumar 499).

Theorists who later analysed the stream of consciousness technique are generally also agreed that the term is unsatisfactory. Diane Filby Gillespie, for



instance, suggests that the metaphor may be more misleading than illuminating as it does not suggest unity sufficiently well ('May Sinclair' 134). Martin Friedman also identifies a difficulty in definition in his observation that critics frequently use the label 'stream of consciousness' indiscriminately and interchangeably with 'interior monologue' (2). He therefore suggests a marked distinction between 'stream of consciousness' and 'interior monologue'. 'Stream of consciousness' thus comes to denote an essential concern with the exploitation of 'the entire area of mental attention', including gradations 'leading to unconsciousness as well as the state of complete awareness' throughout the course of a literary text (3). 'Interior Monologue' then becomes a stylistic technique for representing that consciousness. Likewise, M H Abrams sees 'stream of consciousness' as the inclusive term, with 'interior monologue' reserved for the exact presentation of the process of consciousness (*Glossary* 202).

A problem in definition occurs here, however. Friedman claims that the 'monologue intérieur' or 'stream of consciousness' technique – used here interchangeably - gained favour mainly after the first World War (1). However, the 'interior monologue' technique predates this significantly. Friedman identifies a 'stream of consciousness' style narrative in the novels of Jane Austen, and in attempting to define the origins of the technique he acknowledges the presence of the 'silent inner voice' in much earlier texts. Socrates, for example, 'certainly noticed it', and Plato 'described thought in several of the *Dialogues* as a dialogue of the soul with itself' (Friedman 25). In this case, viewing the 'stream of consciousness' as the inclusive term is problematic and somewhat anachronistic, given that it is a much more recent concept associated with the more experimental stylistic techniques of Modernism. In this chapter, I therefore use 'stream of consciousness' exclusively to designate the Modernist mode of depicting the inner life as

specified by William James and May Sinclair, and developed by writers such as Richardson and Woolf.

Despite Richardson's objections to 'stream' as a metaphor for consciousness, she was nonetheless a major proponent of the technique in her stories as well as her novels. By contrast to her lengthy novel sequence, *Pilgrimage*, the stories depict short bursts of insight into their characters' consciousness through poetic techniques and depictions of the liminal phenomenon of the inner life. Moreover, and significantly, Richardson repeatedly uses the stream as a metaphor for consciousness. This is particularly striking in her June 1912 *Saturday Review* sketch, 'Strawberries', in which memory propels the narrator back into the vivid recollection of a strawberry harvest in Sussex, during which a storm breaks and forces her indoors.

The sketch depicts the consciousness of one character, whose memory of a thunderstorm in the past is blended with her present experience in dry, dusty London through images of water to represent consciousness. Second-person narration, a technique often used by Richardson in her *Saturday Review* sketches, creates a sense of distance between the depicted consciousness and the reader. Memory releases 'a tide that sweeps away London lying tortured under the midday sun, and carries you out of the harbour of your enclosing room' (778). The narrator is swept along on a 'tide', her enclosing room is a 'harbour'; even the traffic outside her room is described as a rush of waters; a 'torrent of eddying refuse' (ibid). In the opening paragraph, the stream is a metaphor for the roads, traffic and refuse that merge in the narrator's consciousness:

The roadways have been watered. The street, offering its surface now and then for a moment for rapid flight from curb to curb, is cool and

slippery. Along the sun-baked pavements the dust swirls in a cloud ('Strawberries' 778).

The sketch is pervaded by images of streams, tides and sweeping torrents of rain as metaphors for consciousness. These images serve as bridging mechanisms connecting the thunderstorm of the past with present events. The sound of a cry from the street - 'Straw ... berries ... English straw ... berries' (778) – is the triggering mechanism for memory. The past of the strawberry picking in the storm becomes the speaker's immediate present and the distinctions between past, present and future disappear. The sketch thus conveys Humphrey's contention that by its nature memory demands a movement that is 'not rigid clock progression. It demands instead the freedom of shifting back and forth, of intermingling past, present, and imagined future' (50). The tenses fuse in the speaker's memory, a space in which progressive temporality is delineated. This typifies the way in which liminality exists beyond or outside progressive, measured time (Turner, 'Liminal' 24).

In 'Strawberries', Richardson's watery imagery coincides with her other recurring metaphor for life and mortality: the pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup> This is conveyed through the speaker's journey through the dusty heat of London to her own room: 'Your solitary footsteps echo back from the high facades promising peace. Presently the five stone steps are reached and left behind, the hall door is closed. You count the stairs as you mount from the stir of the lower rooms' (778). Significantly, the pilgrimage is a frequent Modernist metaphor for mortality, and after this journey is complete the experience of memory is depicted using overt images of death. As the speaker's memory transports her back to the Sussex strawberry fields, the sensation that she may not linger in her freedom is conveyed through small hints of the gathering storm: 'a faint stir



through the breathless spaces, a moment's freshening, and a faint moan that passes by you and dies into the air' (778).

When the storm breaks, 'a mad daylight dances around you [...] the wheels of the open storm rattle deafening across the vault' ('Strawberries' 778). This imagery of the death 'rattle' and the vault to depict the breaking storm – an event linking the present with the past - refers obliquely to boundaries between night and day, youth and maturity, and life and death. Events in the 'present' appear to occur during the twilight of existence. The breeze 'falls with the closing of the door', the air is 'lifeless' (ibid), and the narrator's arrival in her room is described as a sinking 'into the sweet stupor of a dream' and to passing through 'the difficult doorway of silence ...' (778). This scene is ambiguous, possibly relating not only to the workings of memory and the fusing dimensions of past, present and future in one subjective life, but also to the literal experience of death. The second-person narrative depicting the ebb and flow of consciousness also conveys other possibilities: the possible workings of a death drive, a 'pilgrimage' through life into death, or to differing states of consciousness such as dreaming or memory.

As Elisabeth Bronfen points out in her study *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory*, the overlapping of states of consciousness in an intermingling of past and present relates to Richardson's desire 'to be perfectly in two places at once' (2). The depiction of the inner life in 'Strawberries' attains this apparently self-contradictory position. Consciousness, memory, and a delineation of temporality enable the achievement of what Bronfen calls a 'unifying state of suspension between opposites' (ibid).

This state also occurs markedly in Richardson's story 'Excursion', in which the consciousness of an elderly protagonist, Gran, merges with her childhood past. This illustrates how, for Richardson, subjectivity does not exist in terms of a linear progression from birth, through adolescence and adulthood,

into maturity and death. The view that led Richardson to reject the stream of consciousness label is, that whilst subjectivity does expand throughout life, it nevertheless retains a central core of being ('Novels' 397). This is consistent with the view of the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, that it is our own personality in its flowing through time – our self – which endures' ('Duration' 139).

In the textured narrative of 'Excursion', various levels of consciousness are presented through a combination of reverie, sensory perception and silent speech. This 'layered' narrative bears a close resemblance to Bergson's definition of an 'inward self' possessing various levels of consciousness. These levels include perceptions from the material world, memories, 'which more or less adhere to these perceptions and which serve to interpret them', and 'a crowd of virtual actions, more or less firmly bound to these perceptions and memories' (ibid). In 'Excursion', this effect is achieved through the depiction of the grandmother's consciousness through the intermingling of past and present in her memory. The mechanism triggering Gran's reverie is similar to that depicted in Richardson's 'Strawberries', although this time it is the bark of a dog, rather than a cry from the street, that inspires her reflections. The shift in perspective from the third person to the first denotes a move inward, from a depiction of a family holiday in the present, into the complex meandering of Gran's mind into the past.

There are hints of this in the earlier part of the narrative, into which Gran's consciousness encroaches slowly before suddenly engulfing the entire narrative. A conversation between the various characters at the outset of the story is permeated by thoughts that obviously belong to Gran. There are, however, no indications within the text which point to this directly:

'You're not too near the window, Gran?'

‘No; thanks dear. The wind seems to have dropped’.

‘This one usually does towards the end of day’.

Yes. Leaving a splendid sky: huge clouds piled along the horizon, lit by sunset; then by afterglow slowly fading. Jane loves it just as I do. Jane knows all about the doings of the winds (*JP* 96).

The text here flits between the characters without indication in the form of punctuation, and a switch into the first person narrative indicates Gran's reverie. In this way, the earlier part of the text flows as a conversation, rather than a depiction of a conversation in a text, and is permeated by the reflections of an observer who perceives the conversation through her own half-detached consciousness. It is the bark of the dog which marks the divide between past and present and which transports Gran's consciousness away from her observations of the present day and back into her memories of the past. As the two sounds become one in Gran's mind she takes on two simultaneous identities: the mature woman and the child who experienced, along with her sisters, another seaside holiday sixty years in the past:

Black and tan collie. [...]. His barks go up into the sky, making me look up and realise how high it is. Up and up and up. For the first time. I didn't know. I've seen it, and I know, and shall never, never forget (*JP* 98).

This links past events with the present through Gran's fascination with the sky in the earlier part of the narrative. It is through the memory trope that subliminal events take place in the present; the past now being at the forefront of Gran's consciousness. The abrupt narrative shift from the third to the first person indicates that attention is now focused completely on Gran's inner life. The



sudden flow of her consciousness between present and past creates a disorientating effect such as noted by Bergson in his claim that, in the face of a 'universal mobility', there may be some who, accustomed to *terra firma*, 'cannot get used to the rolling and the pitching'. However, the ceaselessly changing self is, for Bergson as well as Richardson, 'the most substantial and durable thing possible' (*Creative Mind* 177). Sheila Rose also suggests that an oscillation between states is a necessary movement in temporal existence, and that the principle illustrates 'the fluctuation of physical and mental states in and in spite of time' (Rose 170). In the passage of reflection that follows the interruption of the narrative by the sudden intrusion of the black and tan collie, it gradually becomes evident that the story is now focused on Gran's memories:

We must have gone to bed, we youngsters, the night before, forlorn, with seaside at an end and nothing ahead but the early morning train at the forgotten railway station up at the back of the town. We shall have been up betimes. Neatly dressed for the journey [...] And then, the letter for Mary. 'Children!' I hear her excited voice. 'Another week! Mother says we can stay another week!' I must have rushed out, just before breakfast, unable to bear, indoors, the overwhelming joy. In a fraction of a second, all darkness gone (*JP* 99)

It is unclear whether Gran's anticipation of the remainder of her holiday belongs to the past, the present, or both. The boundary between the two is indistinct. Memory coalesces with present-day events in the subjective consciousness: 'together in my enraptured mind. And then the dog barked, and I forgot them' (*JP* 101). After a time lapse of sixty years, the experience, not of her seaside joys, but her first discovery of the sky, is recalled vividly. 'Just now' she reflects, 'I felt the shock of it pass through me like an electric current' (ibid). Past and

present remain enmeshed, even in the closing sentences of the story in which Gran recognises 'another evening moving towards its temporary end. Moving into store' (*JP* 103).

The apparently contradictory entities of an unchanging and evolving self are thus reconciled in this story within the temporal space of consciousness. As Sheila Rose points out, when such a past instance is grasped, 'the distinctions of time fall away, leaving no demarcation between "then" and "now". The moment is the same' (Rose 166). As Gran herself understands, 'it is not memory' (*JP* 101). Rather, the convergence of past and present is a manifestation of the continuity of the self. 'Excursion' demonstrates this flux in a fictional reworking of Bergson's theory of 'durée'. Gran's inner life is a medium *between* the past and the present; a textual depiction of the elusive, liminal state of consciousness illustrating Richardson's distinctly Bergsonian belief that 'we know that what greets nature's perfection is the unchanging centre of being in our painfully evolving selves'.<sup>3</sup>

In 'Excursion', Richardson uses the trope of memory to explore the notion of an enduring, unified self to demonstrate that only maturity and the 'wandering' of the mind can reveal the richness and variety of a lifetime's experience. As Gran recognises, 'it is the old who find, and that almost ceaselessly, cause for solicitude for shell-bound youth' (*JP* 102). This notion of consciousness as a rich tapestry of interweaving strands, or what Bergson calls 'a multiplicity of moments bound to each other by a unity which goes through them like a thread', ('Duration' 139) is personified in the character of Gran, whose mature consciousness no longer sees experience chronologically. For Gran, experience may be composed 'after the manner of a picture with all the parts in true perspective and relationship. Moving pictures for moments open out, reveal fresh contents every time we go back into them, grouping and regrouping themselves as we advance' (*JP* 103). The wealth of this discovery,

she suggests, is unattainable until we are 'old and wandering in [our] minds' (ibid).

There is a metaphorical link here between the wanderings of the mind, a 'wondering', and the wanderings associated with the liminal site of the journey as a space between. This is significant, as the verb to wander suggests not walking in a direct pattern, a movement that is echoed by the wanderings of Gran's mind. Gran's inner life, in which the wondering and wandering takes place, is a space between the chaos of consciousness and the order of the perceived world. Language, the bridging mechanism between these two worlds, is thus only capable of representing the subliminal aspects of consciousness by casting them into intelligible sentences. The story suggests freedom and the richness of a lifetime's experience that only old age – itself a transitional phase of life - can bring, yet is only able to reproduce a textual equivalent of that consciousness. It also potentially relegates the subject into a perpetually wandering and wondering psychotic realm of liminality, with no achievable destination other than madness, marginalisation and, ultimately, death. Thus the wandering movement encapsulates the restrictive yet liberating double-bind of liminality.

Like Richardson's 'Excursion', Mansfield's 1920 story, 'Life of Ma Parker' also concerns the inner life of a mature protagonist. Mansfield's representation of her character's consciousness in this story differs from the Bergsonian concept of the unchanging self, or the Paterian ideal of reality as a flux and consciousness as a stream. Instead, the story conveys one woman's life in a few painfully significant moments, dispensing with the conventional linear narrative plot through the literary devices of symbolism, imagery and free indirect discourse. A moment of overwhelming grief in a seemingly ordinary woman's life gives an insight into her mind 'jumping quickly from actuality to



memory and back again [...] terribly and poignantly alive', as May Sinclair described Eliot's figure of J Alfred Prufrock ('A Criticism' 453).

As with Richardson's stories, the inner life of the mature protagonist is conveyed from a position of liminality. The story focuses on mourning, identified by Van Gennep and Turner as a typical social rite of passage. This transitional process remains incomplete, however, as Ma is unable to negotiate the third phase Turner identifies: reintegration into society.<sup>4</sup> The story suggests that the potentially liberating state of richness in maturity celebrated by Richardson also contains the implicit threat of silence, marginalisation and annihilation. Transience constitutes a rite of passage to social change, but carries little potential for liberation in the cases of those who, like Ma, occupy numerous 'abject' social positions: the widow, the bereaved, the elderly, and the impoverished.

Whereas in Mansfield's 'The Fly' and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the notion of uncompleted mourning is depicted as a possible result of war, in 'Life of Ma Parker', it is the result of the social class system. Ma's employer, the 'literary gentleman', is unable to offer condolences to Ma on the loss of her grandchild, merely commenting that 'I hope the funeral went off all right' (CS 301). His comment stems from his belief that 'these people set such a store by funerals' (ibid) but Ma, uncomprehending, responds: 'Beg parding, sir?' This misunderstanding, born out of the differing conventions of their respective social classes, remains unresolved and Ma hobbles into the kitchen, 'clasping the fish bag that held her cleaning things and an apron and a pair of felt shoes' (ibid). She takes off her worn jacket and hangs it up, and as she removes her boots she winces with pain. This short opening section conveys Ma's age and social class through suggestion. Her discourse and worn jacket are indicative of her class and state of poverty, and her rheumatism and the fact that she has been a grandmother convey her mature years.

In a subversion of the traditional linear plot, Ma's story is conveyed through her thoughts and memories, punctuated on occasion by the paraphernalia of her cleaning role. The description of the clouds outside the 'smudgy little window' reflects her clothes: 'they looked very worn, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea' (CS 303). Free indirect discourse depicts how events from Ma's memory coincide with these images of domestic drudgery at a possibly subliminal level of consciousness. The third-person narrator's voice merges with the character being described in Ma's consciousness. Her grandson is at the forefront; the images of the consumptive illness which killed him grotesquely congealing with the sound of water bubbling in a pan:

from Lennie's little box of a chest there came a sound as though something was boiling. There was a great lump of something bubbling in his chest that he couldn't get rid of. When he coughed, the sweat sprang out on his head; his eyes bulged, his hands waved, and the great lump bubbled as a piece of potato knocks in a saucepan (CS 307).

In this passage the grandson's consumption, like the tea-stained clouds, is recreated in Ma's mind in images of the life of poverty, grief and drudgery she has lived. A series of memories occurs in her consciousness, which culminates in a failed attempt to mourn her dead relatives as well as her own life of hardship. Having borne stoically a lifetime of suffering, she is seized by a sudden compulsion to grieve, 'over everything, beginning with her first place and the cruel cook, going on to the doctors, and then the seven little ones, death of her husband, the children's leaving her ...' (CS 308). Yet Ma's impoverished status does not afford her the luxury of mourning, and she is left merely questioning despairingly:

Wasn't there anywhere where she could hide and keep herself to herself and stay as long as she liked, not disturbing anybody, and nobody worrying her? Wasn't there anywhere in the world where she could have her cry out – at last?

Ma Parker stood, looking up and down. The icy wind blew out her apron into a balloon. And now it began to rain.

There was nowhere (CS 308-309).

The phrase 'there was nowhere' is central to the story. Metaphorically, it relates to the way Ma's 'melancholia', to use the Freudian definition, is blocked because she cannot articulate an 'elsewhere'. In a physical sense, 'nowhere' is the condition of never being able to 'stay as long as she like[s]'. Ma's life is a commodity to the service of others; she is unable to vocalise grief whilst she has a living to earn, and as her time is paid for, she cannot 'own' her life, her grief, or even her discourse. Ma is caught in the liminal predicament of being between two worlds. The world of the social order is conveyed through rigid class distinctions that pervade Ma's discourse: even her reflections on mourning are conveyed through the language of her household chores.

Ma's impoverished social position and mature age render her an outsider. She is excluded from the usual social rites of mourning because others own her time. The state of being 'nowhere' equates Ma's inner life of 'wandering' without a destination to that of Gran in Richardson's 'Excursion', in spite of the fact that Gran possesses a 'rich' consciousness and Ma an impoverished one. From her position outside the social order, Ma is unable to enter the random world of mourning, or to re-enter a society that renders her superfluous. The last line of the story, 'there was nowhere', leaves the narrative open-ended. Ma's discourse reflects her inner life as liminal; she hovers



continually between the two worlds of the random and the social yet is incapable of identifying herself with either.

The stories of Mansfield and Richardson thus reveal a focus on the liminal as a condition of the inner life. Subliminal levels of consciousness are hinted at through devices like Ma's household images and the barking dog in 'Excursion', but are only capable of being conveyed through intelligible sentences. The same dilemma is apparent in the work of Virginia Woolf, to whom the inner life was also an important point of concern. Woolf's stories, like those of Mansfield and Richardson, convey a palpable endeavour to move beyond linear plots and depict the essence of the self. Like Richardson, Woolf appeared to be ambivalent about the 'stream of consciousness' technique. She expressed reservations about it whilst also adopting the form in numerous works, particularly her poetic short stories and later novels. It was the narrative style itself that Woolf objected to, however, as opposed to merely the literary label. In a diary entry in 1920, she wrote strongly against the 'damned egotistical self, which ruins Joyce and Richardson to my mind' (*D* 2 14).<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, Woolf sought to develop a prose style that would 'see things without attachment from the outside'. Through this, she attempts to convey 'a sense of burden removed; pretence and make-believe and unreality gone ... [and with it] the horrible activity of the mind's eye' (*WD* 138).

In spite of these objections, however, Woolf became associated with the stream of consciousness form and experimented with it in her novels and short stories. Whilst Bergson's theory of 'durée' finds a fictional representation in Richardson's treatment of consciousness and the inner life in her writing, the influence of the Victorian prose writer, Walter Pater, is discernible in Woolf's work. Ellmann and Fiedelson claim that both Pater's analysis and James's 'stream of consciousness' metaphor are analogous to Bergson's 'bottomless, bankless river' (*ibid*), and like Bergson, Pater was a significant influence on

Modernist prose writers who were engaged in the task of conveying 'reality' through the representation of subjective consciousness. For Pater, as for Bergson, the 'reality' of consciousness is in a constant state of flux. Pater describes this flux as that 'strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves [...] a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream' (183). A frequently quoted passage from Woolf's essay 'Modern Fiction' is a clear reworking of Bergson's and Pater's ideas of a flux of consciousness. In an ordinary mind on an ordinary day, she argues,

The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from old ('Modern Fiction' 189).

For Woolf, the depiction of a receptive consciousness as receiving 'an incessant shower of innumerable atoms', is, as Friedman puts it, the writer's nearest attempt at recording 'pure sensations and images' (Friedman 6). A technique that follows very closely the impression of consciousness Woolf describes in 'Modern Fiction' is adopted in her 1929 story 'The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection'. In this story, the only event that occurs is a woman, Isabella Tyson, going into the garden to cut flowers. The story presents a series of impressions through the eyes of one unnamed narrator, who observes Isabella through a mirror and, from the reflections she sees there, attempts to pin her hostess down to some form of fixed presence. 'There must be truth, there must be a wall', this narrator claims, 'yet it was strange that after knowing her all these years one could not say what the truth about Isabella was' (*HH* 216). The device of the mirror offers a bridging mechanism between the disordered world

of the perceiving consciousness, and the worlds of 'truth', order and reality the narrator tries to establish through a series of reflections of Isabella.

The mirror, one of the prominent images of liminality identified by Rust, is an oblique metaphor for the liminal properties of language itself ('Liminality' 443). Like language, the mirror can never convey 'truth', but can only ever reflect its own reality. In view of this, it is not coincidental that the image on which attention is immediately focused is the looking glass itself. There is a play on the double meaning of reflection as both representative of the images it shows, and as an internal reflection, a *consideration* of those representations. It is significant that the mirror continually distorts the images it reflects, and the narrator, in 'the depths of the sofa' remains beyond its confines. From this vantage point,

one could see reflected in the Italian glass not only the marble-topped table opposite, but a stretch of the garden beyond. One could see a long grass path leading between banks of tall flowers, until, slicing off an angle, the gold rim cut it off (*HH* 210).

Implicitly, the consciousness of the narrator is itself restricted within the frame of the mirror. The flow of impressions emanates from within the glass, but is conveyed through a consciousness beyond it. The narrator interprets the objects she observes, yet there is no attempt to place them together in any coherent order. She believes the world of order, as opposed to the chaos of her disjointed speculations, is attainable through the letters she is sure are in Isabella's cabinet and which, she assumes, hold details of her life and relationships. The text is disrupted by still other texts: the arrival of more mail for Isabella, which comes into focus only gradually.



Suddenly these reflections were ended violently and without a sound. A large black form loomed into the looking-glass; blotted out everything, strewn the table with a packet of marble tablets veined with pink and grey, and was gone. But the picture was entirely altered. [...]. One could not relate these tablets to any human purpose. And then by degrees some logical process set to work on them and began ordering and arranging them and bringing them into the fold of common experience. One realised at last that they were merely letters. The man had brought the post (*HH* 217).

Here, the narrator's consciousness is displaced with the arrival of the letters, in a similar sense to the disruption of the narrative in Richardson's stories by the cry of the strawberry seller and the bark of the dog. The narrator's consciousness wanders, like the depicted consciousness in Richardson's 'Excursion', until the letters appear. For the narrator, this is the mechanism through which the truth of Isabella's identity, and her own, and perhaps life itself, may be attained. The arrival of the letters alters the picture in the mirror, as well as the text of the story. To the narrator, the mail appears 'not merely a handful of casual letters but [...] tablets graven with an eternal truth – if one could read them, one would know everything there was to be known about Isabella, yes, and about life, too' (*HH* 217). This observation is possibly ironic on the part of the narrator. The equation of 'truth' conveyed through marble tablets echoes the book of Exodus, in which Moses breaks the marble tables carved by God and they are re-made in stone.<sup>6</sup> Woolf's story, on the contrary, denies that 'truth' is graven in stone, and the letters are endowed with the human characteristics of pink and grey veins. The obscured contents of the letters also potentially relate to the myriad possibilities offered by language, especially 'hidden' language.

This observation is significant in the context of debates surrounding the stream of consciousness style of narrative. The reference to 'hidden' language as well as to a possible alinguistic realm of feminine consciousness, was at the centre of contemporary debates surrounding a possible inter-relationship between 'stream of consciousness' prose, and what Richardson and Woolf defined respectively as 'feminine prose' and a 'woman's sentence'. Numerous definitions equate these terms with the stream of consciousness. Richardson's description, for instance, poses a marked similarity to the stream of consciousness style of experimental prose identified by May Sinclair in her appropriation of James's psychoanalytical label. 'Feminine prose', Richardson asserts, 'as Charles Dickens and James Joyce have delightfully shown themselves to be aware, should properly be unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstructions' (*Pointed Roofs* 12). Woolf wrote of Richardson's use of this form in *Pilgrimage*, that she had 'invented, or if she had not invented, developed, and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender' ('Romance and the Heart' 191).

These definitions were appropriated by a later school of French feminist theorists, who refer to a strikingly similar writing style to the Modernist definitions of 'stream of consciousness' and 'feminine prose': *l'écriture féminine*.<sup>7</sup> The description Hélène Cixous gives of this style – 'there's no closure, it doesn't stop, and it's this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read' ('Castration' 324) - is almost a direct echo of Richardson's earlier pronouncement. Yet the definition is problematic. Moreover, following Richardson's significant identification of Dickens and Joyce as practitioners of feminine prose, Cixous asserts: 'the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity' ('Castration' 323). This stance is echoed by Julia Kristeva in her essay 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in



which she identifies 'certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce)' as examples of 'feminine' prose ('Revolution' 122). Richardson and Woolf, however, display a deep ambivalence in the wish to present a feminine consciousness, implicitly recognise the traps inherent in doing so.

Woolf's suggestion in 'The Lady in the Looking Glass' that language conveys no 'truth' about subjectivity, is arguably a denial of the more essentialist notion of a feminine prose. The 'shower of atoms' style impressionism used in the story offers a distinct representation of consciousness hinged on the motifs of the letters and the liminal image of the mirror. Like the newspaper in 'A Mark on the Wall', the letters stand as a form of linguistic barrier *between* the perceived worlds of order and randomness.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, however, neither the mirror nor the letters provides the key to life or truth that the narrator seeks. Nor do they attempt to represent an alinguistic realm: an attempt that would be impossible given that the only recourse to this realm is a linguistic or textual 'equivalent'. Instead, the story presents a border-state of consciousness in which the narrator attempts to piece together what she sees as a coherent sequence of events.

The attempt is doomed to failure. Despite the narrator's determination to discover the 'truth' about her hostess, to 'prize her open' and 'fasten her down' (*HH* 218), the irony of the story is that this remains impossible. The mirror distorts the images it picks up, and whilst the narrator thinks she sees the key to truth reflected there, she finds only emptiness. This occurs most markedly when Isabella, the object 'into whose mind one had been trying to penetrate' (*HH* 219) throughout the narrative, suddenly appears in the looking glass herself. Unlike the man with the letters, her reflection gradually becomes larger and larger, until finally her image is revealed in stark clarity. As the glass begins to pour over Isabella an ethereal light, her presence is given the illusion of being 'fixed':



Everything dropped from her – clouds, dress, basket, diamond – all that one had called the creeper and convolvulus. Here was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills. Look as she stood there, old and angular, veined and lined, with her high nose and her wrinkled neck, she did not even trouble to open them (*HH* 219).

The comparison between ‘veined and lined’ Isabella and her letters – ‘veined with pink and grey’ – is unmistakable. Owing to the slippery depiction of ‘truth’ in the narrative, the narrator’s unflattering observation is no more reliable than her misreading of Isabella’s identity throughout the course of the story. The implication here is that no text – no *body* – can be relied on to provide truth. The mirror and the letters that make up the text as a whole reveal only emptiness. Both are metaphors of liminality, forming metaphorical ‘bridges’ between the two worlds of the ordered and the random. Both also give the illusion of conveying ‘reality’, and both reveal the irony that they are capable only of conveying their own truth. As with Richardson’s depictions of the inner life, this offers liberating and restrictive potential. Language shapes and restricts subjectivity, and yet only language offers a means of freedom from the psychotic world of randomness and silence.

It is here that the French feminist theory of *l’écriture féminine*, a writing that is attainable through the realm of the Imaginary, is caught in the liminal paradox. It collapses on its essentialist founding principles, whilst at the same time attempting to rescue itself from them. It seeks to liberate by reclaiming the Imaginary, yet conveys the impossibility of reproducing an alinguistic realm in language. Without language, it is impossible for subjectivity to come into being.

The theory effectively negates itself. It is therefore significant that Richardson and Woolf, whilst presenting the inner life through the consciousness of their women characters, do not reclaim the psychotic 'outside' realm of the liminal as women's peculiar biological fate. This sentiment possibly underlies Woolf's caution in *A Room of One's Own* that 'it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex' (AROO 94), and Richardson's wish to distance herself from a 'reiterated tap-tap' accusing her of feminism (*Pointed Roofs* 12). The Modernist experiment with 'stream of consciousness' prose may therefore on occasion relate to the 'feminine'; it is not, as Richardson takes care to point out, exclusively so, and is never 'female'.

Richardson's story 'Sunday' (1919) also reveals a palpable struggle with the liminality of language and the tension between random and ordered worlds. In this story, language is a 'bridge' between these worlds, but significantly, the bridge is rickety and unstable. In spite of Richardson's contention in 'Excursion' that mature consciousness may convey a richness of experience, this story presents a chilling picture of old age as a site of superfluity. The grandmother is again a key figure, but in 'Sunday' she is continually at the periphery of the narrative. Her only speech is uttered in truncated phrases: 'how are you my dear?' (JP 27), and 'listen to the minister, [...] read your bible every day' (ibid 28). Thus Grannie's consciousness, unlike the colourful, lively consciousness of the grandmother in 'Excursion', remains outside the confines of the narrative.

What is noteworthy about this story is that few words are 'spoken aloud' within it. Communication uttered linguistically between Grannie and the narrator is minimal, and the narrator and Josephine do not converse at all. The narrator's dread of her visit to her elderly, deaf grandmother is communicated wordlessly when the narrator looks up and observes Josephine cutting cake, an act which reminds her in a 'spitefully unconscious vindictive spoil-sport way that it was my turn to go to Grannie's' (JP 25). There is, as the narrator recognises,

'no need' to say it; instead the understanding is reached as 'something leapt from me towards her', and the narrator sees a new and displaced recognition of her day:

Today was still all round the pattern round the edge of my plate, and I felt that a particular way of putting jam on to my bread and butter would keep everything off. But the layer went over, thinning out over the creamy butter, raspberry jam being spread with a trembling hand by nobody, nowhere ... by Josephine. The morning garden, the sunlit afternoon heath, the eternal perfect Sunday happiness of all the rooms in the house were Josephine's. She held them there or snatched them away (*JP* 26).

This passage follows Richardson's typical pattern of the privileging of space over time. Rather than a stretching of minutes and hours, the day takes on a spatial existence beyond the rim of the plate. The act of spreading jam over her bread seems to seal the protagonist's fate still more than the sight of Josephine cutting cake. Although no specific links are made, cake and bread and jam appear to make connections in the speaker's mind with previous visits to the grandmother. The reader is presented with the events themselves in the character's consciousness, but there is no sequence and no explanation of their significance. The scene between Josephine and the speaker is executed without a word being uttered by either, although communication is clearly made between them that the visit to Grannie will take place that day.

Significantly, the metaphor of the bridge is used repeatedly to describe language: 'I strung out thoughts in unfamiliar phrases' the narrator says, 'laughing in advance to blind my hearers until I was safely away over bridge after bridge' (*JP* 29). As a linking mechanism between the random world of



consciousness and the ordered world of linguistic expression, language, however, is suspect. The language the narrator must use to converse with Grannie is the hated 'social talk', a criticism of language which is more than a questioning of its use in a given social context. As Shiv Kumar has noted, the double bind of language as a restrictive and enabling medium is reiterated by Richardson's view of speech as 'a spatialising medium only for social communication'. It is thus an impediment to the smooth flow of consciousness (Kumar 500-501).

This is clearly demonstrated in the 'Sunday' protagonist's attempts to make conversation with her grandmother, which are largely unsuccessful. Following the empty conversation there is a breakdown in the narrator's syntax as she realises the futility of attempting to communicate in the language she has at her disposal.

I nearly bent forward to secure the speaking tube. It was no use. It would carry my thought into action .. All social talk was hatred. I sat twisting my fingers together longing to get back into the incessant wonders and joys away from the room that had seen my truth. The room throbbed with it. It made the room seem lighter, the twilight going backward, evening and gaslight never to come ... when the gaslight came on [...] the room would become quiet and harmless again ... It was dark and cold. Voices were sighing and moaning through the walls (*JP* 29).

This passage focuses on the liminal nature of language itself, which for the narrator, restricts and detracts from her 'truth'. The voices, 'sighing and moaning through the walls' are conveyed through a boundary, dividing the room she occupies from the 'wonders and joys' beyond, indicating a frightening liminal

state which is possibly a fear of death. The words 'it was dark and cold' are echoed in Richardson's 1924 story 'The Garden', in which the phrase 'outside the garden it was dark and cold' conveys a threatening liminal entity. 'It', denoting possibly death, terrifies the 'Garden' protagonist: a child who also exists outside the realm of linguistic communication.<sup>9</sup> In 'Sunday', the light that negates this cold darkness is a liminal image. It is a conceivable equivalent to language, temporarily staving off the profound dread of darkness and death. The lighting of the gas at the transient, liminal period of dusk coincides with the reintroduction of speech into the story: 'the little room was being folded in darkness. The bright light that came into it in the morning was a stranger; a new light. Light the gas, dearie, whispered Grannie' (*JP* 29).

The fact that Grannie speaks, if only in a whisper, reconciles the worlds of random and order through the bridging mechanism of language. Whilst 'Sunday' thus draws attention to the inadequacy of language as a medium of communication, it is also bound to the inescapable fact that without language, human beings cannot 'be'. According to Butler, the signifier 'I' 'is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak' ('Critically Queer' 225-226). Therefore, although 'Sunday' suggests an awareness of the limitations of stream of consciousness and the restrictions of a specifically feminine consciousness, it does not resolve them. The story's examination of the 'outside' and its hints of an incommunicable realm of consciousness, leads straight back to the confines of language. Once the unconscious is brought to the forefront of consciousness it is no longer the 'not said'. The stream of consciousness writing style can thus only create the *illusion* of the direct presentation of a character's consciousness. Language itself is a transitional entity, a 'bridge' between the untangled mass of consciousness in the mind and its textual equivalent as an artefact.



As a representation of the inner life, then, stream of consciousness has its limitations. It is perhaps this fact, as well as its close association with 'feminine prose' in contemporary debate, which led Katherine Mansfield to a consistently vehement criticism of the stream of consciousness technique.<sup>10</sup> As evidenced in her story 'The Life of Ma Parker', Mansfield favoured the less experimental devices of free indirect discourse and symbolism to convey her protagonists' inner lives. Moreover, in a review of May Sinclair's stream of consciousness experiment in her semi-autobiographical novel *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919), Mansfield is categorically dismissive of the novel, questioning whether one can 'think for one moment of the mystery of life when one is at the mercy of surface impressions?' (*Novels* 42).<sup>11</sup>

A similarly negative review of *The Tunnel*, which appeared in the *Athenaeum* in April 1919, criticises Richardson for 'holding out her mind, as it were, and [...] hurtling objects into it as fast as she can throw. [...] But the pace kills' (*Critical Writings* 50). A valid reason as to why Mansfield resisted attempts to set up a separate space in language for women is suggested by Clare Hanson, who claims this stemmed from a recognition that it may lead to 'a loss of real (ultimately political) power for women' ('Mansfield' 303).

A palpable struggle in the endeavour to convey women's inner lives without recourse to setting up a 'separate space' for them in language, is evident in Mansfield's New Zealand stories *Prelude* (1917) and 'At the Bay' (1921). In *Prelude*, a resistance to pre-ordained, gendered subject positions takes place on various levels. Its form flits from one consciousness to another. Like 'Life of Ma Parker', these stories convey the difficulties of fitting into preconceived 'subject positions'. The story draws attention to its characters' negotiation of social 'subject-positions' available to women through the prevalent discourses in circulation in society. As Chris Weedon explains, subject positions 'assume what it is to be a woman or man and seek to constitute our femininity and



masculinity accordingly' (Weedon 100). In Mansfield's Burnell stories, the women characters are depicted negotiating these sometimes-painful assumptions about their subjectivities. In particular, the two Fairfield sisters Linda and Beryl occupy opposing women's subject positions: Beryl as a spinster, Linda as a wife and mother. Each character strenuously resists these roles, and tries to negotiate the opposition they perceive between their 'false' selves and 'true' selves or what Michael Whitworth describes as 'the "contracted" self and the "mask" of abstraction' (Whitworth 161).

In *Prelude*, a palpable resistance to these subject positions is presented, but in the case of the character of Linda, it quickly becomes apparent that this resistance is futile.<sup>12</sup> *Prelude* depicts Linda resisting the maternal subject position. She resents her maternal role, her husband for his sexual demands and for enforcing that role on her, the resulting pregnancy, and her other children. Linda's consciousness, her thoughts and even her dreams are preoccupied with this resentment. At the outset of the story, which focuses on a family's move to a new home in the countryside, the buggy is full and it is uncertain as to whether the 'absolute necessities' Linda declares she will not let out of her sight are her holdalls or her children. When it becomes clear that her decision to 'cast them off' (ibid) does, indeed, refer to the children, it is immediately evident that the maternal role this character plays deviates considerably from socially expected notions of motherhood.

As Judith Butler has noted, the signifiers designating apparently pre-given subject positions do not in fact represent 'pre-given constituencies'. On the contrary, they are 'empty signs which come to bear phantasmic investments of various kinds', thus implying that unity and a full and final recognition of what it means to be a 'whole' subject, can never be achieved (*Bodies that Matter* 191). In Mansfield's New Zealand stories, a tangible representation of this theory is apparent in the character of Beryl Fairfield, who is desperate for

marriage as her means to fulfilment and achieving a 'real' self. Beryl's contemplation of her multiple selves leads her to the wish that 'someone' will find the Beryl who is unknown to her family and friends, someone 'who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover' (CS 242).

Beryl's response to her femininity, in which she is caught between a desire for marriage and a conscious rejection of male advances, is to experiment with various self-consciously acted roles and to 'try on' various feminine identities. These roles are constituted by or in visual artistic images: romantic heroine, femme fatale, and chaste spinster. In *Prelude*, she imagines a suitor watching her playing and singing to herself. She plays and sings 'half to herself, for she was watching herself playing and singing'. Her self-observation causes her to reflect: 'If I were outside the window and looked in and saw myself I really would be rather struck' (CS 39). In the later story 'At the Bay', Beryl's fantasy becomes reality, but when Harry Kember appears under her window in the scene Beryl has imagined in *Prelude*, her reaction is ambivalent. 'Something stirred in her, something reared its head' (CS 243), which leads Beryl to accept his invitation to walk with him, yet when he snatches her to him, she 'slipped, ducked, wrenched free. "You are vile, vile", said she' (CS 244). Beryl is thus caught in a liminal position between her fantasies of suitors and a sexual 'role', and her rejection of this experience when the opportunity arises.

Beryl's attempt to 'try on' various identities echoes Oscar Wilde's use of the mask metaphor to illustrate the changing self. As John McGowran has noted, Wilde's essay 'The Decay of Lying' relates to the attempt to discard the burden of the self 'by celebrating the multiple possibilities offered by the prospect that we adopt a new mask in each successive moment, unhampered by our pasts and motivated by pure whim' (McGowran 427). Yet significantly, the struggle between various subject positions as symbolised by the various 'masks' Beryl adopts, indicates no degree of control over her own identity. Kate



Fullbrook points out that Beryl's negotiation of her limited female subject positions means she is able to measure her success only by the acquisition of a man. Yet Beryl's situation is more complex, and she simultaneously desires and rejects the ideas of a romantic attachment and an independent existence. Her financial dependence and emotional unfulfilment render her 'caught in the period between hope of changing and despair at the permanency of her condition' (Fullbrook 111).

Beryl is thus a physical embodiment of the painful undecidability of the liminal state. For Beryl, as Fullbrook further argues, the means of reconciling her divided self is marriage, which she believes will resolve 'the torment of the internal divisions which assail her' (ibid 112). Beryl believes that if she were to attain her desired subject-position - the role of housewife and mother which Linda plays so reluctantly - it would give her access to her 'real' self and enable her to discard her 'false' multiple identities' (CS 59). According to Butler and Foucault, however, identity is always shifting, always multiple, and never stable. The individual is the site of conflicting modes of subjectivity, and Mansfield's presentation of her Fairfield characters draws continual attention to this conflict.

Beryl's own recognition of her acted out roles suggests how marginal states can be painful places to be. She recognises her own multiple self, her acting roles, as 'false selves',

'I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a moment'. And plainly, plainly, she saw her false self running up and down the stairs, laughing a special trilling laugh if they had visitors, standing under the lamp if a man came to dinner, so that he should see the light on her hair, pouting and pretending to be a little girl when she was asked to play the guitar [...] she saw the real Beryl, a shadow ... a shadow (CS 59).



Beryl believes that 'if she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be' (CS 59), and that if all the masks resembling her different selves could be cast aside, her 'real' self would come into being. The discontinuous state of Beryl's character is a mechanism through which she hopes to save herself from her liminal position, or what Fullbrook calls her 'cultural placelessness' (Fullbrook 112).

The masks constituting Beryl's self, however, are intrinsic aspects of an identity which is always caught between the tensions characterising her available subject positions. Beryl's self is liminal; her masks provide no key to a stable identity, which echoes Wilde's contention in 'The Truth of Masks', that 'in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. [...] The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks' ('Truth' 1016-17). The Masks themselves are thus the closest one can get to the truth. The masks *are* Beryl's identity, which can never be a stable, unified concept as subjectivity itself is subject to a continual state of flux. In a similar vein to Wilde's proclamation that the mask is 'truth', Fullbrook points out that 'the mask *is* Beryl, as much as the doubtful and self-critical response to that mask is also a secret part of her identity' (Fullbrook 112). This identity is inherently liminal and in a continual state of transience. As Wilde significantly notes, 'people whose desire is solely for self-realisation never know where they are going' ('De Profundis' 878). In the cases of Beryl and Linda, this 'wandering' is palpable. Beryl's 'I' is merely a shadow in contrast to the figurative selves she sees as 'false'. As Butler's theories suggest, the alternative to a discursive subjectivity is shadowland.

It is significant that Wilde discusses the 'truth' of masks in the context of the performative: the costumes worn by actors in theatre and the 'reality' this gives the performance. Further light may be shed on this idea by the theories of Judith Butler, who views identity as performative; 'something which we do and

act out, something which we assemble from existing discursive practices, rather than as something which we possess' (*Bodies that Matter* 226-227). Mansfield's negotiation of these painful identities in her New Zealand stories thus presupposes a much later theoretical debate on gendered identity. Beryl's performances are conscious, but Mansfield's representation of these identities also relates them to the subject positions preceding entry into language. The self, articulated through the signifier 'I', is in Butler's theory a *citation* of the 'I' in speech. Rather than an embracing of an unconscious realm of the 'not said', which is in any event impossible, identity is characterised by 'the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak' (ibid 225-226). This is a reiteration of Wilde's contention that masks, and acting out identity, convey no 'truth', but *perform* identity. Thus Wilde is a plausible influence on Mansfield's notion of identity as a citational, reiterated concept.

This notion of identity is also discernible in Mansfield's 1920 story, 'Miss Brill', in which the central protagonist's sudden discovery that life is a play in which she has her own part is the central revelatory moment. The recognition is painful as it forces Miss Brill to view her own 'part' in the performance of life through the uncomplimentary eyes of others, and her subjectivity undergoes a sudden shift as a result.

The symbols of the marginal status of ageing throughout the story are the fox fur and the ermine toque. The fox fur is the first and last image to appear in the story. Its appearance marks the onset of autumn, not only of the seasons, but Miss Brill's own autumn of existence. Miss Brill evidently struggles to come to terms with her ageing throughout this story, a struggle conveyed subtly through suggestion. When she takes out her fur, 'the air was motionless but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill' (CS 330-331). The fur, symbolising this autumnal state, is a decrepit object to which Miss Brill attaches

a great deal of significance, and which becomes identified with her. She views it firstly in a positive sense, an emblem of her youthful self, and then later, negatively when it becomes in her eyes a symbol of her superfluity. At the outset of the story, Miss Brill views the object affectionately in spite of its battered appearance:

‘What has been happening for me?’ said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown! ... But the nose which was of some black composition, wasn’t at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind – a little dab of black sealing-wax when the time came – when it was absolutely necessary ... Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it (CS 31).

There is a symbolic relationship between the fox fur and the shabby ‘ermine toque’. In Miss Brill’s perception, the ermine and its owner mirror one another. She envisages that the fur had been bought when its owner’s hair was yellow but now ‘everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes, was the same colour as the shabby ermine’ (CS 333). Rejected and left alone by her companion, the ‘grey gentleman’ who walks away from her even as she is still talking, the ermine toque merely smiles ‘more brightly than ever’. To Miss Brill, the figure of the ‘ermine toque’ is merely an actress playing the part of maintaining dignity in the face of a humiliating rejection; she ‘raised her hand as though she’d seen someone else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away’ (CS 333). This small, seemingly insignificant personal tragedy nevertheless infiltrates its surroundings, and Miss Brill apparently recognises this state when in her own consciousness ‘the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat “The Brute!” “The Brute!” over and over’ (ibid).



Even whilst she pities the 'ermine toque', Miss Brill does not equate herself with the other woman's story until she recognises the scene as a play. At the outset of the story, she views herself as set apart from the crowd. She does not recognise herself in the reflections of her fellow-'actors', but merely notices 'something funny' about them. Through Miss Brill's eyes, they are 'odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd come from dark little rooms or even – even cupboards!' (CS 332). A seemingly trivial event, the appearance of a brown dog which 'trotted on solemnly, and then slowly trotted off, like a little "theatre dog"', initiates Miss Brill's most important discovery. This moment of revelation triggers Miss Brill's realisation that:

They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance, after all (CS 334).

The realisation that life and subjectivity itself is a performance holds significant implications for future theorists like Butler. It is a Modernist aesthetic and one to which Woolf, too, devotes her attention in her final novel, aptly called *Between the Acts* (1941). Mansfield's text carries within it the possibility of a recognition that identity is performative, that, as Butler puts it, action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices* ('Critically Queer' 226-227). Elsewhere, Butler states that the performative aspect of identity is not a 'singular act used by an already established subject'. Instead, it is merely one of the 'powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being' (*Excitable Speech* 160).

Butler's description of subjectivity as an 'act' is significant here. Whilst Miss Brill recognises the scene as a play and even comes to distinguish her own part in that play, she is powerless to control her performance. Her subjectivity *is* the performance, and her perceptions of that subjectivity change in accordance with others' perceptions of the part she herself plays. The notion of gender as a performance implies, as Alsop *et al* point out, that a subject or agent who is formed prior to the act then engages with them, 'maybe choosing which acts to perform' (*Theorising Gender* 99). However, according to Butler, scripts may vary and change with time but there is 'no doer behind the deed' (ibid). Miss Brill is able to recognise her part, but is unable to resist, influence or control it.

A shift in her perspective of her own role occurs when Miss Brill encounters a young couple who judge her as harshly as she earlier does the 'ermine toque', and the owners of these two battered, worn furs thus become connected through these images of superfluity. Miss Brill sees the young couple as the central characters of the play, 'the hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht' (CS 335). Now, however, instead of her prior conception of herself as 'an actress' (CS 334) she sees herself for the first time through the eyes of others, as an ageing, superfluous woman on the margins of her own play. She hears the boy ask, 'Why does she come here at all – who wants her?' (ibid). The girl responds, mocking the fox fur 'it's [...] so funny. It's exactly like a fried whiting' (ibid). Ironically, Miss Brill had previously mocked the crowd, who are 'nearly all old' and have something 'funny' about them, and the ermine toque whose owner's hair had faded to match its colour. Until this point it has not occurred to Miss Brill to relate these images to herself.

Miss Brill's discovery of life as a performance breaks up the two 'acts' of her play and with it, the 'self' she possesses before and after her new awareness. The music the band plays conveys '- not sadness – no, not sadness – a something that made you want to sing' (CS 334-335), reflects an emotion



which causes Miss Brill to look, smiling, 'at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought – though what they understood she didn't know' (CS 334-335). Her understanding is misplaced, however. Before making her first exhilarating discovery which quickly turns to devastation she has 'misread' her own part in setting herself aside from the crowd whose personal tragedies she observes with a detached, amused eye and whom she sees as 'odd'. The effect on her when she does acknowledge her own part is devastating. The performance comes to an abrupt end; or might be more accurately described as shifting to the next scene.

For the first time, Miss Brill compares herself to the other characters in her play, which continues as she returns home, climbs the stairs and walks into her little dark room – her room 'like a cupboard', she now recognises. She is thus forced to see herself as one of the participants in her play she had observed earlier, the 'odd, silent, nearly all old' people who lived in cupboards. Her reaction is to discard the fur the girl has laughed at 'quickly, without looking', into its box. Again the confusion with her own emotions is bound up with the image of the fur: 'when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying' (CS 335). Miss Brill's return to her cupboard-like room is echoed by the act of shutting of the fur into its box. Prior to this point, the fur and what it represents gives Miss Brill a position from which to speak. Once this is discarded, the story suggests there are no remaining subject positions for the ageing protagonist other than a slow slide into non-being.

Characters like Miss Brill, and Linda in *Prelude*, demonstrate the means by which women become trapped in a liminal state between subject positions, into which they must somehow fit in order to achieve at least an illusion of a stable identity. The impossibility of this is demonstrated in the symbolic 'burial' of Miss Brill's fox fur, and Linda's death-wish of sailing away, which I discuss in Chapter 7. These self-annihilating fantasies suggest the implicit dangers of an



essentialist 'woman's sentence'. In Lacanian terms, attempting to think outside the Law entails embracing the psychotic realm of the liminal: madness, exile, silence and exclusion. The notions of identity explored in Mansfield's fiction, and arguably also in the works of Wilde and Butler, are less pessimistic. What is for Lacan 'unthinkable' is for Butler unthinkable 'within *dominant culture*' (*Theorising Gender* 99-100).

The problems surrounding the liminal double bind are also illuminated by the literary techniques used to convey the inner life. As the Modernists themselves recognised, stream of consciousness has limited value as a metaphor. Its association with 'feminine prose' is problematic as men write in this way too, which has the result that the concept is 'rescued' from essentialism whilst collapsing on its own founding principle of sexual 'difference'. Moreover, as metaphor for the inner life itself, 'stream of consciousness' is elusive. Richardson and Woolf remained ambivalent about it, and even Sinclair, who coined the term, was aware of its limitations as a narrative method.

As Sinclair puts it, 'confined to one consciousness, the reader shares its prejudices and its blindnesses. 'You know no more of the other people in the book than it knows but you get a much more vivid and real presentation of that particular character's life than you would by standing outside it' ('Future' 477). Alternatively, Mansfield's use of symbolism and free indirect discourse is less formally experimental, but sensitive to the linguistic 'traps' of stream of consciousness narrative, which threaten to restrict identity, particularly in view of the feminine consciousness. As Clare Hanson suggests, Mansfield's refusal to accept a negative linguistic domain as inherently 'feminine' might therefore be viewed as a vindication of her 'insistent holding on to a position of control and authority in language' (Hanson, 'Mansfield' 303).

As a liminal entity, language restricts, determining and representing narrowly defined subject positions in a symbolic world giving the illusion of order.

Yet in spite of these restrictions, it is only language that saves us from the world of randomness and its implicit threat of silence, marginalisation, psychosis and death. As Butler points out, the excluded and threatening possibilities of the 'traumatic outside', an entity consistently explored throughout Modernist depictions of the inner life, is a subversive force that 'motivates and, eventually, thwarts the linguistic urge to intelligibility' (*Bodies that Matter* 192). This paradoxical liberating and restrictive double bind is the state of the liminal, and through the representation of the inner life in their short stories, Mansfield, Richardson and Woolf raised significant questions about the relationship between liminality, language and subjectivity. Whilst these three writers adopt diverse attitudes to contemporary experimental literary techniques and styles, their work has a consistent theme in common. The language used to depict the inner life in each of these stories is a bridging mechanism *between* the chaotic world of subjective consciousness and the ordered world of structure, syntax, and textual representation. As Miriam Henderson, the protagonist of *Pilgrimage*, succinctly describes it, 'language is the only way of expressing anything, and it dims everything' (*Pilgrimage* II, 99). A bridge between two worlds, the language of the Modernist inner life is inherently liminal.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In her review of the first three instalments of *Pilgrimage*, Sinclair asserts that through the depiction of her protagonist's stream of consciousness 'going on and on', Richardson succeeds in becoming 'the first writer to devise an authentic method of depicting reality' ('The Novels' 444).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'Queen of Spring', *Focus* (Sept 1907), 262.

<sup>4</sup> Van Gennep and Turner identify three phases in a rite of passage: *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation* (See Turner 24; Van Gennep 146-147). Liminal rites marking out the transitional periods of mourning allow their participants to stand aside from normal social conventions, albeit temporarily. The subject then reenters society through reintegration rites.

<sup>5</sup> These two writers were frequently compared as sections from *Interim* were published alongside episodes from *Ulysses* in the *Little Review* in 1919-20, which also ran articles comparing Richardson and Joyce.

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<sup>6</sup> See Exodus 32: 'And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables'; Exodus 32: 19: 'Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand, and brake them'; and Exodus 34:1: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon *these* tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest'.

<sup>7</sup> As 'stream of consciousness' is grounded in early psychoanalysis, the French feminist definition of *l'écriture féminine* also builds on the grounding principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which rewrites the Freudian Oedipus complex in terms of the way in which subjectivity relates to language. As girls make the entry into language differently from boys, they retain a secret access to the pre-linguistic realm of the Imaginary. For a fuller explanation see Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 143.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> D H Lawrence was also roundly scathing of stream of consciousness prose, which he likened to a 'death-rattle' in the throats of writers like Richardson, Proust and Joyce (qtd Fromm 154).

<sup>11</sup> According to Murry who wrote to Mansfield about it afterwards, Sinclair had been 'terribly upset' by this review of her work (*KM Letters to JMM* 280).

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 7 discusses how Linda's fantasies about relinquishing her maternal role lead in the end to self-annihilation as her only means of escape (see pages 237-238).



## Chapter 5

### Out Of the Ordinary: The Revelatory Moment as a Space Between

Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world – this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves (Woolf, *D* 3 218).

Virginia Woolf's dilemma as to whether life is a solid or a shifting entity rests on a pivotal Modernist concern: the nature of the moment. For Woolf, the moment is a tangible entity: something 'I stand on', and yet she also refers to it as fleeting and evanescent: 'I shall pass like a cloud on the waves'. The fact that Woolf here equates the moment with her *self* is significant, suggesting an affinity between the fleeting moment and subjective life. The common factor connecting these two entities is liminality. As the Modernist short stories discussed in this chapter demonstrate consistently, the revelatory moment is posited *between* the two contradictions that haunt Woolf. As demonstrated in the Modernist literary aesthetic, however, the 'moment' is liminal, consisting of neither a solid state of being nor a transitory, evanescent one, but always occupying a space between.

Defined variously as a revelatory moment, moment of being or epiphany, the Modernist moment is thus identifiable as liminal, resting frequently on such transient, in-between states as cultural displacement, sexuality, death, and marginality. It is a space between subjective states of being, between unity and transitoriness, and also, importantly, between ordinary, commonplace events and the heightened awareness of the spiritual. In a typical Modernist depiction of the revelatory moment, attention is drawn to a liminal state where these apparent dichotomies blend, clash, and are deconstructed. The opposition

between unity and transience dissolves in Modernist representations of the epiphany which, in a mode typical of liminality, displace linear-progressive temporality. Like the memory trope commonly used in Modernist short fiction, the textual depiction of the epiphanic moment encapsulates, as John Blades has noted, 'all time itself – past present and future (racial as well as personal)' (*A Portrait* 160).

Like the liminal metaphor of the pilgrimage, the epiphany is a Biblical concept embodying spiritual connotations. It is here that Blades notes an apparent contrast between the spiritual epiphanies of James Joyce, which reveal truths about a 'vast human universe' and are 'truly cosmic' in their revelations (Blades 162), and Woolf's apparently trifling, 'personal and domestic' moments. The contrast, however, is merely a superficial one. As Woolf notes in her memoirs 'A Sketch of the Past', separate moments of being are 'embedded in many more moments of non-being', which she describes as 'a kind of nondescript cotton wool'.<sup>1</sup> This 'non-being' constitutes a great part of every day that is not lived consciously (*MB* 70), and Woolf's own description of her moments of vision as 'little daily miracles, illuminations' (*TTL* 118), suggests they are rooted in everyday experience. It is thus the essence of the ordinary that is capable of inspiring what Woolf called 'a revelation of some order [...] a token of some real thing behind appearances' (*MB* 72).

Critics have also noted an association between the epiphany and ordinary, everyday events. Liesl Olson, Morris Beja and Eric Auerbach all claim that Modernism is chiefly concerned with ordinary events as opposed to the heightened awareness of the epiphany. Auerbach, for instance, claims Woolf's fiction is concerned with 'minor, unimpressive, random events' ('Brown Stocking' 546), whilst according to Alex Zwerdling, Woolf's concern with ordinary events has been masked by a critical tendency to privilege the extraordinary over the everyday (Zwerdling 165).

As opposed to a stark polarity between apparent opposites, however, the Modernist moment is an elusive space positioned between extraordinary and everyday events. The tension between these polarities is palpable through the device of the epiphany in Woolf's story 'An Unwritten Novel' (1920). Like Dorothy Richardson's sketch 'Journey to Paradise', the story adopts the typical liminal situation of a train journey as a metaphor for life. It is a monologue on the nature of life, death, relationships forged and dropped, and the constitution of the self. The story further demonstrates, as Olson puts it, 'the difficulty of "knowing" another person, the transience of meaningful moments, the shiftiness of perspective, and the desire to pin down character' (Olson 57).

This difficulty is also explored in Woolf's essay outlining the attributes of Modernist fiction, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1923), which is strikingly similar in its subject matter of a railway journey and the attempt to attribute a 'solid' identity to a woman character. The narrators of both the story and the essay are unable to pin down the women characters they meet in the transient space of the railway carriage. In the essay, the narrator professes the hope that 'I may show you what I mean by character in itself; that you may realise the different aspects it can wear; and the hideous perils that beset you directly to try to describe it in words' ('Bennett and Brown' 71). As the narrator acknowledges, however, the character is a will-'o-the-wisp; a phantom that few catch: 'most have to be content with a scrap of her dress or a wisp of her hair' ('Bennett and Brown' 69).

In each of these texts, Woolf takes ordinary characters, and in the act of writing about them makes them out of the ordinary. Mrs Brown is depicted as a clean and threadbare old lady with 'something pinched about her – a look of suffering, of apprehension'. This look is echoed in her physical appearance and the extreme tidiness of her apparel, with 'everything buttoned, fastened, tied together, mended and brushed up', which in the narrator's eyes 'suggests more



extreme poverty than rags and dirt' ('Bennett and Brown' 72). In 'An Unwritten Novel' the persona of 'Minnie Marsh' is also imagined by the narrator to have mended gloves. The narrator mentally connects Minnie to a scene of crisis by the threads of her stitched gloves, asserting that 'the pulse's quickened, the moment's coming, the threads are racing, Niagara's ahead. Here's the crisis!' (HH 114-115). Significantly, the metaphor of the 'thread' relates to Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* (1867), in which he describes 'reality' as 'a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it' (qtd Whitworth 152). Significantly, in 'A Sketch of the Past' Woolf similarly referred to her scene-making as 'a means of summing up and making a knot out of innumerable little threads' (MB 142).

This imagined 'crisis' which merges with the threads is a central moment of recognition in 'An Unwritten Novel', providing an implicit connection between Minnie Marsh and the narrator. In observing the object of her study over the rim of *The Times*, the narrator perceives that Minnie's look of unhappiness 'was enough by itself to make one's eyes slide above the paper's edge to the poor woman's face – insignificant without that look, almost a symbol of human destiny within it' (HH 106). Given Woolf's assertion in *Moments of Being* that 'behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern' (MB 72), the story suggests that the pattern is in part suffering. As the narrator points out, this is a concept that 'we all know, *The Times* knows – but we pretend we don't' (HH 106).

In folding the newspaper to make a 'shield' against this connection, 'a perfect square, crisp, thick, impervious even to life', the narrator perceives that Minnie Marsh 'pierced through my shield; she gazed into my eyes as if searching any sediment of courage at the depths of them' (HH 106-107). As in 'A Mark on the Wall', the newspaper becomes a liminal image centring on suffering. It forges an illusory connection between the battlefields of war and the home front, thus drawing attention to the inaccuracy of the official, heroic and

jingoistic accounts of war reported in the media as opposed to the bloodshed of reality.<sup>2</sup> In view of this, rather than serving as the connecting mechanism it appears to be, the newspaper becomes a barrier. This is echoed in 'An Unwritten Novel' in the narrator's observation that the *Times* pretends not to 'know'. The newspaper becomes a barrier between the suffering of two women who appear to connect alinguistically.

One of several significant moments in the story is the recognition of the assumed 'suffering' connecting the narrator to Minnie. Significantly, Oscar Wilde also makes this connection in his essay *De Profundis*, which John McGowran has linked to the Paterian view of the self. For Wilde, the discovery of the essence of the human soul is only attainable through pain. Moreover, Christ's pointing out that there was 'no difference at all between the lives of others and one's own life' ('De Profundis' 854), indicates what McGowran calls the 'distressing' fact of human sameness which is the reality revealed by Christian individualism (McGowran 433-34). In Wilde's assertion that 'life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death', McGowran identifies Pater's theory of reality as being in a constant flux and asserts that 'this Christ holds a recognisably Paterian view of life' (McGowran 435).

Suffering is demonstrated in 'An Unwritten Novel' when an unspoken connection is forged between the two characters in the form of two imaginary spots, each resembling a 'stain of sin'. This has connotations within both the Christian religion and criminality, which the narrator attributes to Minnie. The story plays on the words pane and pain, and the movement of scratching the pane and then the spot between the shoulder blades - 'as if, after the spasm, some spot between the shoulders burned or itched' (*HH* 107) - connects the two characters. The narrator then observes the woman taking her glove and rubbing at a spot on the window-pane 'as if she would rub something out for ever –



some stain, some indelible contamination. Indeed, the spot remained for all her rubbing' (*HH* 107). The narrator mimics this action with her own glove and she, too, is unable to remove the spot from the window. Following her attempt, 'the spasm went through me; I crooked my arm and plucked at the middle of my back' (*HH* 108).

The narrator refers to this mirrored action as an unspoken secret shared; the 'secret' being the 'stain of sin' which links spirituality, criminality, and suffering. The narrator concludes that Minnie has communicated, 'passed her poison; she would speak no more' (*HH* 108).<sup>3</sup> The narrator also concludes that Minnie Marsh's 'poison' is the crime of neglecting her baby brother whilst she shops in the sales: 'we don't shut til seven', and then it *is* seven. She runs, she rushes, home she reaches, but too late. Neighbours – the doctor – baby brother – the kettle – scalded – hospital – dead – or only the shock of it, the blame' (*HH* 109).

The fact of Minnie Marsh and the narrator both carrying the same 'spot' is again symptomatic of sin, suffering, death, and spirituality as varying aspects of everyday life. The story echoes Wilde's contention that 'suffering is one very long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons [...] With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one centre of pain' ('De Profundis' 853). This characterises the lives of the two women in Woolf's essay and story, and demonstrates how the moment of being encapsulates the flux of existence throughout daily life. Some moments remain non-being whilst others spark an extreme crisis or self-revelation which can centre on suffering as much as a sense of liberation.

The metaphor of the railway journey reveals the importance of fleeting moments in the present, as well as the ephemeral nature of the self. For the narrator of 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', the impression made by the essay's small, ordinary and uninspiring protagonist 'came pouring out like a draught, like



a smell of burning. What was it composed of – that overwhelming and peculiar impression? Myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas' ('Bennett and Brown' 74). For all her ordinariness, Mrs Brown is remarkable here for her extraordinariness and the 'overwhelming impression' she makes on her perceiver.

For the 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' narrator, Mrs Brown is a physical embodiment of human nature. She is eternal and changes only on the surface. As the narrator points out, 'it is the novelists who get in and out – there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her' (ibid). Whether the modern authors were any more capable of doing so is a dilemma both these short pieces tackle. As demonstrated in 'An Unwritten Novel', pinning down such a character in her liminal status between extraordinary and everyday and within the fleeting moments occupied within the transient entity of the journey of life, is no easy task.

The narrator's attempts to bestow an identity upon her character are therefore largely unsuccessful. This elusiveness is prefigured in Pater's 'Conclusion', in which a connection is made between the isolation of each individual and each moment from every other. As McGowran notes, 'Pater is willing only to endorse the reality of the absolute present, even while acknowledging that the present moment is so fleeting as to be almost imperceptible, almost unreal' (McGowran 421). Like Pater's 'atomism', the 'shower of atoms' style of impressionism Woolf endorses in 'Modern Fiction' focuses on the evanescent, fleeting moment as a metaphor for the self. The receiving of intense and vital impressions within a limited period of time illustrates what McGowran calls 'a melancholic hyperconsciousness that we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of infinite reprieve' (McGowran 420). The epiphany, like the Modernist metaphor of the pilgrimage, is thus a liminal strategy representing life as fleeting and transient.

In 'An Unwritten Novel' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', this transient quality focuses on a 'misreading' of the two characters of Minnie and Mrs Brown by their respective observers. In 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', the fleeting encounter between the narrator and her subject is demonstrated in the speaker's suggestion that 'Mrs Brown must be rescued, expressed, and set in her high relations to the world before the train stopped and she disappeared forever' ('Bennett and Brown' 84). This objective remains out of reach. Mrs Brown disappears into the station, 'very small, very tenacious; at once very frail and very heroic. And I have never seen her again, and I shall never know what became of her' ('Bennett and Brown' 74). Likewise, although the narrator of 'An Unwritten Novel' is sure she has read Minnie right, when she assists her with her luggage she is astounded to be told her son is coming to meet her. This revelation sparks a series of questions: 'What do I stand on? What do I know?' (*HH* 115). Importantly, however, for Woolf it is the 'moment I stand on' (*D* 3 218) which is identified with the self. Her recognition that 'that's not Minnie' is ironic, yet raises the question: 'who am I? Life's bare as a bone' (*HH* 115). For a fleeting moment, there is a divergence between 'standing on' a perceived moment, and a state of passing, 'like a cloud on the waves'. The narrator's moment of revelation thus rests on a liminal condition between solid and shifting entities.

The elusive natures of Minnie Marsh and the narrator of 'An Unwritten Novel' thus suggest that there is no real 'essence' behind appearances. A search for the 'higher reality' or 'heightened self awareness' the epiphany represents, leads only back to a state of liminality. This works to dissolve the connection forged between Minnie and the narrator by the 'spot', and its replacement by separation and the individualism of the self in Paterian terms:

But when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking? - the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world – a coward perhaps, yet somehow beautiful (*HH* 114).

The narrator's musings on the constitution of the self are depicted in the deathly imagery of the 'entombed soul' and a spirit driven into a catacomb. It is ironic that death answers in a moment which, as McGowran puts it, tells us nothing about 'reality out there, but [does] still let me know that I exist [...] right now in this very moment' (McGowran 423). This encapsulates the tension between opposites – extraordinary and everyday, life and death – which characterises liminality.

As 'An Unwritten Novel' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' illustrate, the liminal quality of the epiphany is inspired by ordinary things. Ordinary objects, a work of art, an overheard fragment of conversation, or what James Joyce's protagonist Stephen Dedalus calls some 'memorable phrase of the mind itself' (Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 216) appear in various Modernist texts as instigators of the moment of vision. It is noteworthy that a fragment of snatched conversation inspires the formal definition of the epiphany in Joyce's *Stephen Hero*, the earlier version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In overhearing a few words of conversation, Stephen identifies the epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation'. He believed that it was for the man of letters to 'record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments' (*Stephen Hero* 216).

This state of suspension between opposites is discernible in Annette Oxindine's relation of the epiphany to sexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality in the short fiction of Virginia Woolf, although there are also instances of this in the work of Katherine Mansfield. Oxindine also claims that the epiphany is



Modernism's 'primary spiritual landmark' ('Sexing the Epiphany' 51).<sup>4</sup> The connection between the epiphany and sexuality is also made by Jacobs, who claims that a close examination of the concept of the epiphany shows 'a reaction against an unsettling multiplicity of language and sexuality' (Jacobs 22) on the part of Stephen Dedalus. The climactic passages which convey Stephen's epiphanies amalgamate both his 'nascent sexuality and his attempts to define his creative and physical self' (Jacobs 21).

This occurs in Stephen's major epiphanic moment in *A Portrait of the Artist*, when he experiences a profoundly sexual vision of a girl whom he likens to 'a strange and beautiful seabird'. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh' (Joyce 132). The sight of the girl, which passes into Stephen's soul 'for ever' induces a moment of spiritual recognition in which 'her eyes had called him and his soul had leapt at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!' (Joyce 131-132).

The instigation of an epiphany through an intensely sexual image, as well as the notion of creating 'life out of life' being linked to birth as well as artistic creation, equates the epiphany to sexuality. In spite of the fact that the 'label' epiphany is attributable directly to Joyce, its influences and origins are more complex. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* drops any overt reference to the epiphany, and Beja also notes that Joyce's protagonist 'merely provides a new name for an old experience' (Beja 13). The philosopher Henri Bergson and the Victorian prose writer Walter Pater are discernible influences, whilst May Sinclair's theory of sublimation, developed through psychoanalytic theory and idealist philosophy, is also a predecessor of the Modernist aesthetic of the epiphany. In her quest to represent the 'reality' she perceived existed behind multiplicity and change, Sinclair illustrated the close connection between mysticism, sublimation and the Modernist epiphany in her lengthy philosophical

study *Defence of Idealism* (344). The book describes a sequence of moments resembling Pater's 'flux', an ordinary moment that becomes extraordinary in the eyes of a perceiving consciousness:

Moments when eternal Beauty is seized travelling through time; moments when things that we have seen all our lives without truly seeing them [...] change to us in an instant of time, and show the secret and imperishable life they harbour (ibid 379).

Fictional examples of sublimation as a mystical experience are scattered throughout Sinclair's novels and short stories. For instance, in 'If the Dead Knew', a young man is desperate to marry, but because of his impoverished state, he is unable to do so during his mother's lifetime. He and his fiancée both then sublimate their passionate libidos into music, as indicated in Effie's response to Wilfred's church-organ recital:

The young girl who stood beside him drew in a deep, rushing breath; her heart swelled; her whole body listened, with hurried senses desiring the climax, the crash of sound. [...] she loved his playing hands, his rocking body, his superb, excited gesture [...] The climax had come. The voluntary fell from its height and died in a long cadence, thinned out, a trickling, trembling diminuendo. It was all over.

The young girl released her breath in a long, trembling sigh (*US* 163).

This passage is pervaded with overtly sexual language, but the sexual impulse is sublimated into the creative art of music. Through this act Wilfred, in a reenactment of the Freudian scenario, sacrifices his desire for Effie to the care

of his mother, and sublimates his sexual passion into his playing. Effie, from whose perspective the scene is depicted, shares this experience. Having wished his mother dead in order that he can marry, Wilfred's guilty conscience becomes her 'apparition', a literal manifestation of his torment.

Sinclair has explored thoroughly the connection between artistic creation and sexuality in her non-fiction, as well as in her novels and short stories. Her writing frequently focuses on the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation, which connects sexuality to art through the channelling of the libido into aesthetic creation. Freud suggests sublimation involves the abandonment of sexual aims and the transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido 'and then, perhaps, goes on to give it another aim' ('Ego and Super-Ego' 31). Sinclair however adopts Jung's use of the term 'libido' to mean 'creative energy' in general, sexuality being 'one among many aspects and functions of the libido' ('Symbolism and Sublimation' I 120). For her, 'all religion, all art, all literature, all science are sublimations in various stages of perfection' (ibid 119). This notion of producing a new creation out of sublimated sexual energy also follows Jung's principle that

where the deep sources of the ocean are, the leviathan lives; from there the all-destroying flood ascends, the all-engulfing flood of animal passion. That stifling, compressing feeling of the onward-surgings impulse is projected mythologically as a flood which, rising up and over all, destroys all that exists, in order to allow a new and better creation to come forth from this destruction ('Psychology of Unconscious' 68).

In this passage, the 'destructive' flood of passion which destroys in order to create is not only implicitly linked to the sublimation of sexual energy into a 'better creation', but the imagery Jung employs is also biblical, suggesting an



affinity with the spiritual aspect of the epiphany. Sinclair equates the libido to a transcendental signified which is 'eternal, indestructible, pure in its essence, infinite in its manifestations, of which the sexual impulse is only one' ('Symbolism II' 144). Following Jung, Sinclair also describes sublimation as a quasi-mystical state and goes as far as to assert that 'only through the mystery of self-sacrifice is it possible to be "born again"' (Sinclair, 'Symbolism' 142). This spiritual aspect of sublimation is also characteristic of the Joycean epiphany, suggesting a connection between both aesthetics and the Christian religion. Sublimation, in its close connection with both spirituality and sexuality, thus anticipated the epiphany.

In 'If the Dead Knew', the 'haunting' of the chief protagonist is primarily a manifestation of his guilt over his own sexual impulses. The story explores the Freudian concepts of the uncanny, the effects of the cloying mother/son dyad, and the haunting of the conscious by the desires of the id. The story deals primarily with the painful psychological conflict between desire and duty. This manifests itself as another self, which the main protagonist, Wilfred, discovers within his psyche and which is capable of 'willing' his mother's destruction in order to satisfy his desire for the woman that he wishes to marry. Wilfred reflects, 'He was thirty-five now, and Effie was twenty-five. Before they could marry, they would be fifty-five and forty-five; old, old; too old to feel, to care passionately' (US, 169).

When his mother falls ill, Wilfred tries to block out Effie's image, pressing in on his eyelids to keep out the sight of her, but is unable to control his ambivalent feelings. Were his mother to die, he and Effie would sleep together. 'Perhaps in that bed, on those pillows' (ibid 178). Wilfred loves his mother 'up to the moment of supreme temptation, when he wanted Effie' (ibid 185). When Mrs Hollyer dies, however, Wilfred is convinced that his own will is responsible for her death, and this causes a 'split' in his consciousness:

It was as if his secret self had broken loose, and got through to his mother, and had killed her secretly, in the dark. His wish was a part of himself, but stronger than himself. The force behind it was indestructible, for it was a form of his desire for Effie; so that while he lived he could not kill it (178).

If this 'self' is read as a manifestation of the Freudian 'id', it is possible to view the ghost as a projection of guilt onto an external object. The apparition is a symbolic manifestation of the guilt Wilfred tries desperately to suppress and deny, and which later returns to torment him. Wilfred's psychological torment, symbolised by his mother's ghost, is the result of his conviction that his dead mother somehow knows 'she had died because secretly, he had wished her dead' (185). The apparition, whose eyes express 'an intensity of suffering, of unfathomable grief' (ibid), signifies Wilfred's perception of his mother's distress as the guilt of the son who has 'willed' her death.

The figure of Effie, who shares Wilfred's sublimative experiences, is an intermediary.<sup>5</sup> She is a liminal, go-between figure who possesses a mystic insight and eventually brings about a rapprochement between Wilfred and the 'apparition'. Significantly, it is music into which Effie and Wilfred sublimate their desires at the outset and denouement of the story, and the heightened awareness Effie achieves through her sublimative ability enables her to effect a reconciliation between Wilfred and his dead mother. Significantly, this is achieved by the same means: piano playing. Effie persuades Wilfred to return to the feared drawing room, the scene of the phantom's visit, and play. Wilfred's playing of his mother's favourite music brings the second, more forgiving apparition, a 'supreme manifestation' who, 'self to innermost self', gives Wilfred 'her blessedness, her peace' (ibid 188).

Sinclair's ideal of sublimation has prompted criticism on the basis of its being merely an elaborate form of repression. Jean Radcliffe, for instance, claims in her introduction to *Mary Olivier* that the theme of sacrifice pervades Sinclair's work and may be viewed as 'an elaborate rationalisation of – yet again – self denial' (Introduction, *Olivier* unpaginated). Sinclair, however, claims that both Freud and Jung underrate the value of repression ('Symbolism II' 142). She suggests that 'if in the visions of many ascetic mystics we have a demonstration of the revenges of the repressed libido, still, even in the region of aestheticism a great deal that passes for repression was really sublimation' ('Symbolism II' 143). This points to a connection between the ideas of Sinclair and T S Eliot, who in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' reasoned that 'poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' ('Tradition' 21).

In endeavouring to explain the latter statement, Eliot claims that the viewpoint he criticises here relates to the metaphysical theory of the soul. Rather than expressing 'personality', the poet must work within a specific medium, namely language, 'which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in particular and unexpected ways' ('Tradition', 19-10). To add further complexity, Eliot then goes on to suggest that 'only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from those things' (ibid). This is conceivably what Katherine Mansfield was referring to when she wrote in her *Journal* of 'my philosophy, the defeat of the personal' (145). This finds a further explanation in a letter to Richard Murry, in which Mansfield asserted that

I find my great difficulty in writing is to learn to submit. Not that one ought to be without resistance – of course I don't mean that. But when



I'm writing I want to lose myself in the soul of the other that I am not  
(*LKM* // 93).

Eliot's and Mansfield's attitudes towards the artist's need to 'escape' and 'submit' as a necessary condition for writing, indicate something more than a desire to escape personality or submit in an elaborate form of repression. The definitions of each writer point to a sublimation of creative energy into art. Sinclair's complex aesthetic of sublimation as quite apart and distinct from repression, is another possible response to the escape from emotion in art, and to channelling the powerful energies of the libidino into artistic creation.

A potential example of sublimation occurs in Mansfield's story 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', in which two sisters devote their lives to the care of their father and each experiences a profoundly sexual moment of liberation after his death.<sup>6</sup> This rare experience of freedom is encountered when the sisters gradually realise that the death of their father means a relief from their domestic burdens and freedom from his tyrannical, oppressive rule. As Josephine comes to realise, with one or two brief reprieves she and her sister have spent their lives 'looking after their father at the same time keeping out of father's way'. The remainder of the story focuses on her unanswered question 'But now? But now?' (283).

The revelatory moment is triggered by the music of a barrel organ. At this sound, the sisters realise they need not chase it away to avoid disturbing their father, and begin to understand that they are free from their lives of domestic servitude and responsibility. Each then experiences a revelatory moment that she is unable wholly to acknowledge. For instance, Constantia observes her ornamental Buddha and experiences the uncanny sensation that 'He knew something; he had a secret. "I know something you don't know", said her Buddha. Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she had always felt

there was ... something' (CS 282). Although unacknowledged, the 'something' potentially refers to Constantia's repressed sexuality. Having heard the music of the barrel organ, Constantia stays by the Buddha until it stops playing, wondering, but not in her usual vague way but in the sense of longing.

She remembered the time she had come in here, crept out of bed in her night-gown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn't minded (ibid 284).

This passage suggests Constantia's embracing of her own sexuality, which has only surfaced after the releasing mechanism of the colonel's death. The image of crucifixion is reminiscent of Constantia's sacrifice of her life to the care of her father, and the divine image of Christ suggests chastity and purity. The crucifixion image is, however, juxtaposed with the moon, which is a common motif for sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in 'Daughters of the Late Colonel' the moon is also juxtaposed with the images of the 'horrible dancing figures', a theme of the *danse macabre*, whose leers Constantia does not mind in spite of her sacrificial pose. At the same time the other sister, Josephine, hears sparrows chirping on the window-ledge, but feels they are 'not sparrows, not on the window-ledge. It was inside her, that queer little crying noise. *Yeep – eyeep – yeep!* Ah, what was it crying, so weak and so forlorn?' (ibid 283).

There is a strong similarity between Josephine's displacing her own crying onto the birds, and the story of Miss Brill, in which the central protagonist 'projects' her crying onto her fox fur. The realisation of Josephine's freedom is, however, marked by her grief for the self she could have been and prompts her speculation that 'if mother had lived, might they have married?' (CS 283).

Josephine's liminal position is marked by her transitional rite of passage of mourning, but like Miss Brill, she is also mourning for a self she could have been. Miss Brill's state is even more pessimistic, as she symbolically 'buries' the fur, an emblem of her discarded youth, whilst simultaneously burying herself in the coffin-like space of her 'room like a cupboard' (CS 335). Both stories convey depressing realisations of the lack of subject positions on offer in society for the ageing, superfluous woman.

The two bereaved daughters are thus haunted by mysterious, inexplicable longings relating to their unfulfilled sexuality. Constantia is aware of the presence of a secret, but is only able to describe it with the elusive definition of 'something'. Likewise, the crying of the sparrow is the only mode used within the text of conveying Josephine's experience, which is so elusive that Josephine is unable to identify the source of the crying as herself. It is noteworthy that these yearnings occur only in a state of liminality which is capable of bringing about transformation. Constantia recognises herself as liminal, reflecting that 'it was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. But what did it mean? What was it she was always wanting?' (ibid). The epiphany, simultaneously experienced by both characters, symbolises this rite of passage but their inability to convey exactly what they have experienced is reminiscent of a state outside the social and outside of everyday experience. In trying to convey their reflections to one another, although attempting to express something profoundly important, the sisters' discourse breaks down into staccato, elliptical and fragmented sentences.

'Don't you think perhaps –' [Constantia] began.

But Josephine interrupted her. 'I was wondering if now –' she murmured. They stopped; they waited for each other.



‘Go on, Con’, said Josephine.

‘No, no Jug; after you’, said Constantia. [...]

A pause. Then Constantia said faintly, ‘I can’t say what I was going to say, Jug, because I’ve forgotten what it was ... that I was going to say’.

Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, ‘I’ve forgotten too’ (ibid 284-85).

In this passage, there is a characteristic breakdown in the syntax of the characters. The ability to express their experiences in words eludes them, drawing attention to the epiphany as a realm of ‘not thought’, or ‘not said’. As Derrida points out however, this raises the difficulty of how we can ‘include in a discourse, *any* discourse, that which, being the condition of discourse, would by its very essence *escape* discourse?’ (Derrida, ‘Foreword’ to *Magic Word* xxxii). In other words, language is a condition of being that cannot be escaped. The struggle is to make words convey experience, or as Eliot put it in *Four Quartets*, the stories convey ‘the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings’ (*Four Quartets* 17). Elsewhere, Eliot’s protagonist J Alfred Prufrock proclaims: ‘It is impossible to say just what I mean!’ (*Selected Poems* 15).

The difficulties involved in depicting a linguistic representation of the epiphany also arise from the fact that, as Anthony Pilkington has noted, language is a shared, public medium which is only capable of conveying the aspects of experience that are ‘common property’ (Pilkington 5). The starting point of the revelatory moment is a vivid experience: a perception, sensation or idea. Where problems arise is in any attempt to convey such experience through the public convention of language. As Pilkington puts it, given the nature of ordinary language, it is inevitable that the quality that sets the significant moment apart from other experience is omitted (ibid).

In a wider Modernist context, this 'intolerable wrestle with words' also characterises Stephen Dedalus's epiphanic experiences. Stephen's moments are frequently marked by recognition of his sexuality, as illustrated in the scene with the bird-girl, and are also characterised by a similar syntactic breakdown to that commonly found in Mansfield's writing. As previously indicated, Dedalus first identifies the epiphany after overhearing a broken, fragmented conversation:

The Young Lady-(drawling discreetly) ... O, yes ... I was ... at the ... cha  
... pel. ...

The Young Gentleman-(inaudibly) ... I ... (again inaudibly) ... I ...

The Young Lady-(softly) ... O ... but you're ... ver ... ry ... wick ... ed. ...  
(*Stephen Hero* 216).

It is this apparently trivial and disjointed conversation that prompts Stephen to identify the spiritual moment as a key component of his artistic vision. The elusive nature of the epiphany makes it difficult to translate the experience into language, which has to be wrenched and dislocated in order to convey it. The triviality of the conversation inspires Stephen's definition of the epiphany as 'the most delicate and evanescent of moments'; 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself' (*Stephen Hero* 216). The incident itself is unimportant other than for the fact that it inspires the revelation. In the context of the profoundly sexual nature of his encounter with the bird-girl, Stephen's epiphanies are suggestive of the close interrelationship between the 'heightened' revelation of the epiphany and its relation with sexuality, as well as the more mundane experiences of everyday life. There is a similar implicit connection between sexuality,

sublimation and the epiphany in Sinclair's 'If the Dead Knew' and Mansfield's 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', in which sublimation and the epiphany are linked through liminality. The connection between sexuality and death also features prominently in these stories.

In Modernist short fiction, the theme of sexuality often occurs in the setting of the party. Like the holiday in Richardson's stories 'A Journey to Paradise', 'Tryst', and 'Excursion', the party occupies a liminal state, or what Jane Wilkinson has referred to as a 'departure from the normal, everyday routine into a world of appearance, of the external, the abundant, the superfluous' ('Feasting to Death' 23). Paradoxically, however, dispensing with the monotony of everyday life entails, by implication, 'the unaccepted sides of our existence – poverty, violence, disease and death' (ibid). Modernist short stories frequently examine these themes in the context of the party. After the completion of *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf produced a sequence of eight short stories, all of which were set at Mrs Dalloway's party.<sup>8</sup> This sequence presents a series of small pictures, each story representing the perspective of one or two characters. Mansfield's New Zealand story sequence about the Sheridan family also concentrates on parties and social events, again a form of liminality.

A revelatory moment focusing on sexuality takes place in Woolf's short story 'Together and Apart', which forms part of her sequence of stories set at Mrs Dalloway's party. The story consists of a brief dialogue between two people that is punctuated at intervals with the reverie of both. It focuses on a fleeting encounter between the protagonist, Ruth Anning, and Mr Serle, to whom Clarissa introduces her at the outset of the narrative. The two characters share an explosive revelatory moment and an intense spiritual connection, after which they have nothing further to say to each other. The narrative ends on their parting: 'She did her part; he his. So things came to an end. And over them both came instantly that paralysing blankness of feeling' (*HH* 187-88). It comes as a



relief to Miss Anning when another guest addresses Mr Serle and 'they could separate' (*HH* 188).

Although Mr Serle and Miss Anning have little in common they share a deeply personal and intense moment of vision at the mention of Canterbury, which causes Miss Anning to feel a momentary sexual attraction for a man she dislikes. As with Constantia in 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', it is the moon, which for Miss Anning symbolises man, that inspires her moment of revelation. Under its influence 'she was capable of saying almost anything and she settled in to disinter the true man who was buried under the false' (*HH* 184).<sup>9</sup>

An insight into Serle is gained through his own passages of reverie. A chauvinist and a narcissist, it transpires that Serle's wife is an invalid, whose different cures and doctors 'Roderick Serle snubbed off by some caustic remark too clever for her to meet, except by gentle expostulations and a tear or two' (*HH* 185). Like his writing, the gestures and movements of which he is constantly aware are affected, artificial and contrived: 'a little unconventional and distinguished' (*HH* 185). For her part, Miss Anning 'did not feel sure that she liked this distinguished, melancholy man with his gestures; and it's odd, she thought, how one's feelings are influenced' (*ibid*). Further, there 'stagnated in him unstirred a sort of superiority to his company', and in his regular visits to parties in a season, he feels 'nothing out of the common, or only sentimental regrets' (*ibid*). Serle initially dismisses Miss Anning as a 'nice quiet woman who played some instrument and seemed intelligent and had good eyes', but who knew little (*HH* 184). However, at Miss Anning's proclamation 'I loved Canterbury', Serle kindles instantly: 'it was his gift, his fault, his destiny. "Loved it", he repeated. "I can see that you did"' (*HH* 186). An intense moment of self-revelation then strikes Serle 'like a white bolt in a mist', and he experiences

the old ecstasy of life; its invincible assault; for it was unpleasant, at the same time that it rejoiced and rejuvenated and filled the veins and nerves with threads of ice and fire; it was terrifying (*HH* 186-87).

This passage is permeated with the tensions and opposites which characterise the epiphany and liminality, the suspension between opposites which constitutes the 'sudden shock' of the moment of being. The oxymoron 'ice and fire' describing Serle's nerves and veins demonstrates these opposites, as does his recognition that the experience is as unpleasant and disturbing as it is ecstatic. The 'white bolt' Serle experiences in his epiphany echoes Miss Anning's original experiences in Canterbury, in which she recollects an acquaintance's comment about a storm: 'Whenever I wake, or hear thunder in the night, I think "someone has been killed"'. Miss Anning's memory of Canterbury is 'all thundercloud and livid apple blossom, and the long grey backs of the buildings' (*HH* 186). In this passage, death and sexuality are linked through the oblique reference to war and the image of the flowering fruit tree. Serle equates female sexuality with the tree in his observation of a fellow guest as 'a fruit tree – like a flowering cherry tree' (185). In a similar sense, the emerging sexuality of the character of Bertha Young is related to the flowering pear tree in 'Bliss'. Ruth Anning sees this as a 'nice sort of image'. She does not like Mr Serle, 'though she rather liked that comparison of his of a woman to a cherry tree' (*HH* 185). The two characters are also connected by Miss Anning's recollection of the 'livid apple blossom' which characterises her memories of Canterbury:

Sometimes she wished she had married. Sometimes the cool peace of middle life, with its automatic devices for shielding mind and body from bruises, seemed to her, compared with the thunder and the livid apple

blossom of Canterbury, base. She could imagine something different, more like lightning, more intense (*HH* 187).

Feeling 'some physical sensation' and also imagining that she and Mr Serle knew each other so perfectly (*HH* 187), Miss Anning sees the irrationality of human intercourse, 'her dislike being now nothing short of the most intense and rapturous love, but directly the word "love" occurred to her, she rejected it' (*HH* 187). This passage is clearly sexual and relates to Miss Anning's momentary sexual attraction for Serle, but after the moment has passed, there is no change in their original feelings of mutual dislike. Ruth is also unable to define her experience in words and struggles to name 'the withdrawal of human affection, Serle's disappearance, and the instant need they were both under to cover up what was so desolating and degrading to human nature that everyone tried to bury it decently from sight' (*HH* 187). Miss Anning's inability to name her experience relates to the elusive and untouchable quality of her moment of vision. The fleeting nature of her encounter is depicted in her sensation of herself and Mr Serle as 'atoms, motes, standing there at Mrs Dalloway's window, and their lives, seen by moonlight, as long as an insect's and no more important' (*HH* 183).

In Woolf's story, the epiphanic moment is once again centred on sexuality. Joshua Jacobs substantiates this view in his observation of the epiphany in the work of James Joyce as 'a correspondence between fragmented, stylised speech and the sexuality that pervades its utterance' (Jacobs 22). Stephen's desire for artistic creation, 'to recreate life out of life' (*A Portrait* 132) is inspired by the sexual image of the bird-girl. Jacobs also notes that as Stephen prowls Nighttown in search of sexual gratification, his desire 'is repeated hypnotically, and with a powerfully physicalised language: 'He tried to bid his tongue speak' (100); 'her round arms held him firmly to her'; 'his lips



would not bend to kiss her' (101)' (Jacobs 24). The physical language used to depict Stephen's encounter is strikingly similar to an extract in Katherine Mansfield's story, 'Bliss', which concerns an unidentified source of ecstasy. However, Bertha finds this abruptly cut off when she appears to witness a scene in the hallway between her husband and her friend:

He tossed the coat away, put his hands on her shoulders and turned her violently to him. His lips said: "I adore you", and Miss Fulton laid her moonbeam fingers on his cheeks and smiled her sleepy smile. Harry's nostrils quivered; his lips curled back in a hideous grin while he whispered: "To-morrow", and with her eyelids, Miss Fulton said: "Yes" (ibid 205).

This language used to convey this passage, whilst invoking a strongly physical image, is nevertheless evasive. The line "His lips said: 'I adore you'" prefigures Joyce's phrase 'his lips would not bend to kiss her'. The vagueness of this speech, Jacobs observes, is a literal invocation of 'the organs of speech', in that the lips and tongue conveying this speech 'become speech themselves' (Jacobs 25). Thus the sexualised 'incarnate communication' becomes a readable text (ibid).

The language here, whilst overtly sexual, is sufficiently elusive and ambiguous to offer numerous possibilities. Broken syntax is the only means by which Mansfield's protagonists are able to attempt to convey their experience, in the same way that a disjointed conversation inspires Stephen's Dedalus's idea of the epiphany. Yet a breakdown in expression is perhaps the condition by which such a liminal state is attainable at all. The scene is viewed through the eyes of an unreliable narrator who is already unable to identify the sources of her emotions or to recognise her sexuality.

From Bertha's perspective, an affair between Harry and Miss Fulton may be real, imagined or misconstrued. Bertha's tragedy is one of frustrated sexuality and occupying the outsider position determined by her liminal status. A liminar even in the familiarity of her own surroundings, Bertha 'hardly dared' to breathe for fear of encouraging her heightened state of emotion, and also 'hardly dared to look into the cold mirror – but she did look, and it gave her back a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes and an air of listening, waiting for something ...' (ibid 92). Bertha also does not dare to rebuke the nurse for allowing her baby daughter to clutch at a dog's ear. The repetition of Bertha's 'hardly daring' is reminiscent of T S Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in which the protagonist muses 'And indeed there will be time / To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?" [...] Do I dare / Disturb the universe?' (*Selected Poems* 12). The tragedy of the anti-hero Prufrock is his pent-up sexuality and passion in an ageing body: 'is it perfume from a dress / That makes me so digress?' (ibid 13) and the fact that he does not dare to express it.

Bertha similarly finds difficulty in articulating her sexuality, although her silence and inability to 'dare' to disturb the parameters surrounding her stem from an unacknowledged rather than a frustrated sexuality. Her frigidity is something she attempts to explain away. Notwithstanding that her 'coldness' concerns her, she believes she and her husband are 'frank with each other', and that they are 'as much in love as ever' (96), 'in every other way, but just not in that way' (103). Bertha also misreads her own sense of 'bliss' and the source of her outsider status though the images she sees as symbols of her own life. The flowering pear tree symbolises her own sexuality, whilst the opposing image of the 'grey cat, dragging its belly', (96) creeping across the lawn followed by 'a black one, its shadow', is the one dissenting image in the earlier part of the narrative. By the end of the story, however, the images converge. The pear tree is viewed by Bertha as a positive symbol of her own life. A flowering fruit

tree is a symbol of fertility and in its attractiveness and cultivated nature within the domesticated boundaries of the garden, is also symbolic of the expected conditions of middle-class femininity.

The tree however is juxtaposed with the cat, the sight of which earlier in the story gives Bertha 'a curious shiver' (96). Bertha herself is equated with both images when she dresses for the evening dinner party. Feeling dizzy and drunk with her feeling of bliss, 'she was so tired she could not drag herself upstairs to dress' (97). This echoes the image of the cat 'dragging its belly', although Bertha also relates herself to the colours of the tree in her choice of clothes: 'A white dress, a string of jade beads, green shoes and stockings. It wasn't intentional. She had thought of this scheme hours before she had stood at the drawing-room window' (97). As Pearl and the poet, Eddie, leave together, Pearl says simply: 'Your lovely pear tree' (105), and Eddie follows her out of the house 'like the black cat following the grey cat' (ibid). The shadow, an image of the liminar, represents Bertha's confusion over her identity and sexual ambivalence. The shadow conveys Bertha's experience of alienation, of not possessing a 'real' subjectivity or sense of self, or of being defined by the 'shadow' of sex, in much the same way as the figure of Beryl in *Prelude* sees her 'real' self as 'a shadow ... a shadow' (59).

Typically, Bertha's epiphany is inspired by her liminal status, a shadow between two states of being. At the outset of the story, Bertha's state of bliss is what marks her separation from everyday life. The state of many areas of liminality within her life accords with a number of those identified by Victor Turner: death, invisibility, darkness and bisexuality (*Pilgrimage* 249-250). 'Bliss' embodies all of these factors. The most significant events take place in classically liminal areas: the street corner where the feeling of bliss overwhelms her, the threshold at which she is shut out of her home, and the hallway where



the ambiguous scene of implied sexuality between her husband and her friend takes place.

Whether this moment of revelation changes Bertha's long-term perceptions remains outside the margins of the story. Her response to events is to seek out the view of the pear tree where she and Miss Fulton had stood, in Bertha's perception 'understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms' (ibid 102). After the scene in the hallway, Bertha returns to the window and cries: 'Oh, what is going to happen now?' 'But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still' (205), hinting that nothing in the story has changed other than the perceptions and even perhaps the character of its main protagonist. The moment of recognition is fleeting, and the story does not resolve Bertha's dilemma. The revelatory moment exposes the truth of a character's condition simultaneously to the protagonist and the reader, but this recognition is momentary. As Wilkinson puts it, the 'mist is lifted' for a moment from the 'undiscovered country' of the secret self, after which it closes in again and ordinary life resumes, with little apparent difference (23). Mansfield wrote to her friend Dorothy Brett of this aesthetic aim in similar terms: 'just as on those mornings white silky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then disclose it, I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again' (CLKM 85).

A similar notion of the self's continuity, discernible through fleeting moments, is the subject of Mansfield's story 'Her First Ball', which traces a young girl's perceptions and emotions throughout her first society dance. The story forms part of another sequence of New Zealand stories, this time about the wealthy Sheridan family who take their young cousin Leila to her first appearance in society. At first Leila is excited by the newness of the scene,

then later disillusioned when she recognises the strictures such social appearances may eventually put upon her.

There are similarities between Leila and Laura, the youngest Sheridan sister. Both are on the cusp of adulthood, having only recently left childhood behind. In the other story involving the Sheridans, 'The Garden Party', Laura experiences an epiphanic moment upon confronting death, which is one of the initiation rites of passage referred to by Van Gennep which marks her transition into adulthood. Leila experiences a similar revelation on negotiating her first major social dance in this story. Both characters are still endowed with childlike attributes. At one stage 'Laura passed and gave her the faintest little wink; it made Leila wonder for a moment whether she was quite grown up after all' (CS 340-41). Later in the narrative after her elderly dance partner distresses Leila with a bitter speculation on her likely fate, 'deep inside her a little girl threw her pinafore over her head and sobbed. Why had he spoiled it all?' (CS 343).

The divide between before and after Leila's moment of realisation is marked by a difference in her perceptions and responses. At the outset of the narrative these are exaggerated, as she is unaware of what to expect. Leila finds difficulty in being indifferent like her companions, the experienced Sheridan sisters, and although 'She tried not to smile too much; she tried not to care' she finds 'every single thing [...] so new and exciting ...' (CS 336). The road is 'bright on either side with moving fan-like lights, and on the pavement gay couples seemed to float through the air; little satin shoes chased each other like birds' (CS 337). Leila even experiences a pang when her cousin Laurie throws away the tissue paper from his new gloves, as 'she would like to have kept those wisps as a keepsake, as a remembrance' (CS 336). At this stage, Leila sees objects with the vivid clarity of the newcomer who views unfamiliar objects in detail. The atmosphere is unforgettable because of its unfamiliarity:

it was thrilling. Her first ball! She was only at the beginning of everything. It seemed to her that she had never known what the night was like before. Up till now it had been dark, silent, beautiful very often – oh yes – but mournful somehow. Solemn. And now it would never be like that again – it had opened dazzling bright (CS 341).

The epiphany in this story is structured around the oppositions of youth and age, and life and death; illustrating how fleeting youth and life are. This again relates to Bergson's theory of *durée*, in which he compares the inner life to 'the unrolling of a coil, for there is no living being who does not feel himself coming gradually to the end of his role; and to live is to grow old' (Bergson 139). According to Bergson, 'our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory' (ibid 140). This occurs in 'Her First Ball' in a conversation between Leila and her elderly dance partner who takes offence at Leila's reference to his advanced age: 'I think it's marvellous to be still going on' (CS 342). In revenge, he tells her she will end up like the chaperones in black: "your heart will ache, ache" – the fat man squeezed her closer still, as if he really was sorry for that poor heart – "because no one wants to kiss you now" (CS 342). This is one of Mansfield's more negative moments of recognition, showing the dance as a metaphor not only for life, but also as a movement towards ageing and death.<sup>10</sup> This is reflected in the reverie which Leila's chilling realisation prompts:

Was this first ball only the beginning of her last ball, after all? At that the music seemed to change; it sounded sad, sad; it rose upon a great sigh. Oh, how quickly things changed! Why didn't happiness last for ever? For ever wasn't a bit too long.

'I want to stop', she said (CS 342).



After the point of her seeing her life which is characteristic of Mansfield's epiphanies, the narrative changes. In the earlier part of the story, even the inanimate objects Leila contemplates are perceived in her imagination to be dancing; in the cab, 'the bolster on which her hand rested felt like the sleeve of an unknown man's dress suit; and away they bowled, past waltzing lamp-posts and houses and fences and trees' (CS 336). On entering the drill hall and preparing for the dance, 'A great quivering jet of gas lighted the ladies' room. It couldn't wait; it was dancing already. When the door opened again and there came a burst of tuning from the drill hall, it leaped almost to the ceiling' (CS 337). After the dance with the fat man, Leila is disinclined to continue dancing but is compelled to complete her programme out of politeness. Her observations at this stage are blurred and lose their clarity: 'her feet glided, glided. The lights, the azaleas, the dresses, the pink faces, the velvet chairs, all became one beautiful flying wheel' (CS 343). After her recognition of her possible future fate, Leila's feeling of euphoria deflates. The converging of the objects she perceives during her final dance into 'one beautiful flying wheel' (ibid) poses a stark contrast to the animated detail with which she views objects during the earlier part of the narrative.

The blurring of objects during Leila's last dance in the final lines of the story echoes its outset. The start of the ball is indistinct; Leila is unable to say exactly when the ball began, 'perhaps her first real partner was the cab' (CS 336). For Leila a momentous change has taken place in one significant moment, and the blurring at the outset and end of the narrative is juxtaposed with the clarity of its central defining moments. The movement of the dance and the suspension of her own past, present and future in her recognition of her fate, demonstrate Bergson's notion of the unity of existence appearing as 'some

immobile substratum of that which is moving, [...] some intemporal essence of time' (Bergson 143).

For Bergson this constitutes 'an eternity of death, since it is nothing else than the movement emptied of the mobility which made its life' (Bergson 143). Leila's 'sudden shock' is, typically of the moment of being, a fleeting one. When she later encounters the man who had seemingly shattered her youthful delusions, 'she smiled at him more radiantly than ever. She didn't even recognise him again' (CS 343). However, the legacy of the moment is lasting and has brought about a subtle change. The blurring of the dance at the end as opposed to the earlier clarity of Leila's perceptions indicates that she is already starting to act out the scenario perceived for her by the fat man. The scene has lost its newness and the surrounding objects now lack the sharp definition Leila perceives as a newcomer. At her first social event, society already holds Leila in its grip and will mould her into her expected fate. The epiphanic revelation is characteristic of liminality, in which shifts in perception are neither sudden nor momentous but initiate a gradual process of change. In 'Her First Ball', the narrative strategy of the epiphanic revelatory moment suggests that change is already starting to take place.

The epiphany is the site of liminality which for Bergson hovers between duration and intuition: 'A living, and therefore still moving eternity, in which our own particular life duration would be included as the vibrations are in light; an eternity which would be the concentration of all duration' (Bergson, 144). It is only between these two extreme limits, Bergson argues, that intuition moves. It is a liminal condition which is captured by the Modernist epiphany. Woolf echoes this when she writes of the changing and evolving self, 'Perhaps it may be that though we change; [...] yet we are somehow successive, & continuous – we human beings; & show the light through. But what is the light? I am impressed by the transitoriness of human life' (*D* 3 218). This suggests Woolf's

notion of lived 'reality' as a pattern behind the cotton wool never actually emerges. In spite of the powerful effect of the epiphanic revelation and, at times, its spiritual, quasi-mystical quality, the stories suggest, as Beja puts it, 'some great revelation hovering nearby, ready to be grasped', yet it is ironic that the great revelation never actually comes (Beja 112) and is ultimately incommunicable. The moment of revelation thus exposes only what McGowran describes as 'an atomistic universe of utterly discrete monads and moments that exist only to and for themselves' (McGowran 424).

In its fleeting nature the epiphany may be identified as a state in which Turner and Turner locate a 'symbolic inversion of social roles'. These, however, do not offer a lasting change. For Turner, the liminal does not offer open-endedness or the possibility that the freedom of thought inherent in the principle of liminality leads to a major reforming of the social structure. Instead, liminality allows what Turner describes as a 'reality-testing' (Turner, *Pilgrimage*, 2-3). The Modernist epiphany was a literary strategy for a fictional interrogation of received notions of 'reality' in this way. It is perhaps for this reason that the epiphany is too intimately connected with the everyday to be divorced from it as an opposing state of being. Without the 'cotton wool', the description of everyday existence used by Woolf in her memoirs *Moments of Being*, the 'sudden shock' of revelation could not manifest itself. It is this tension, an apparent polarity distinguishing the extraordinary from the everyday, in which the epiphany generally resides in the Modernist short story.

The final irreconcilable paradox inherent in the liminal moment of being is suggested in the question posed by the narrator of 'An Unwritten Novel': 'when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking?' (*HH* 114). When the living self speaks, what answers is death, mortality and liminality. Whether the 'moment' on which life rests is very solid or very shifting, it is never revealed as either a tangible entity or a phenomenon that passes 'like a cloud on the waves', but



something ultimately irreconcilable and inherently between states. Ironically, the epiphany is a revelatory moment that does not reveal; a manifestation of subjective being which communicates nothing of 'reality'. As Olson points out, the everyday, by the very virtue of its fictional representation, 'becomes more than just ordinary' (Olson 52). However, in its characteristic condition of suspension between opposites, the epiphanic moment also reveals only the transient. It is a 'spiritual manifestation' which, in spite of its condition of being out of the ordinary, is ultimately nothing but ordinary.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Alex Zwerdling points out, the 'radically disjunct' selection of Woolf's memoirs was collated and posthumously entitled *Moments of Being* by Jeanne Schulkind. The title comes from Woolf's short story 'Moments of Being: "Slater's Pins have no Points"'.  
<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3 pages 91-93.

<sup>3</sup> The reference to a 'poison' and an attempt to wipe out a spot which remains in spite of attempts to remove it is reminiscent of the torment suffered by Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth after inciting her husband to murder so she may gain his power and throne by proxy. See *Macbeth*, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Other lengthy studies on epiphany include John Blades' *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1991); Claire Swisher's *Readings on A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2000), and Wim Tigges' *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany* (1999).

<sup>5</sup> The intermediary is an important figure in Sinclair's exploration of both mysticism and sublimation, as detailed in my discussion of her story 'The Intercessor' in Chapter 6.

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair's stories of sublimation focus frequently on children sacrificing their lives to the care of sick or elderly parents. This theme is central to her novels *Mary Oliver: A Life* and *The Three Sisters*, and her short story 'If the Dead Knew'.

<sup>7</sup> In Mansfield's story 'Bliss', it is under the moon's glare that Bertha experiences her own revelatory moments which are connected to her confused and half-acknowledged sexuality. In Woolf's 'Together and Apart', a sighting of the moon initiates a momentary sexual attraction between two indifferent parties.

<sup>8</sup> These consist of 'The New Dress', 'Happiness', 'Ancestors', 'The Introduction', 'Together and Apart', 'The Man Who Loved his Kind', 'A Simple Melody', and 'Summing Up'. Mansfield's stories about the Burnell family consist of *Prelude* (originally *The Aloe*), 'At the Bay', 'The Little Girl', and 'The Doll's House'. The stories about the Sheridans consist of 'The Garden Party', and 'Her First Ball'.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Anning's impression of Mr Serle as a series of masks and true and false selves is also similar to Mansfield's depictions of the characters of Bertha Young and Beryl Fairfield.

<sup>10</sup> The *danse macabre*, a theme of Poe's 'the Masque of the Red Death' is echoed in Woolf's essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' and discussed in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

### The Uncanny Tradition and the Individual Talent: Modernism, Mysticism, and Metaphysics

In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), T S Eliot wrote that 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' ('Tradition' 15). This observation is discernible in the literary tradition of the Gothic and in particular, the short-story genre of the supernatural tale. Oblique, ambiguous and typically experimental, the fragmented and impressionistic Modernist short story explores the space between what is seen and what is unseen, what is palpable and what is intangible.

The 'space between' these apparently opposing entities is the domain explored in stories by May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf in particular, who share an interest in mysticism and the contemporary science of psychoanalysis which are often combined in the Modernist uncanny story. The 'ghost', whether a supernatural 'manifestation' or a more ambiguous 'haunting' of the psyche, is a tangible representation of this liminal space. The theme of liminality thus forges a palpable connection between Modernism and the Gothic tradition, a link which Wallace and Smith claim has been largely critically overlooked. Their study of *Gothic Modernisms* points to an apparent opposition between the 'elitism' commonly associated with Modernism, and the Gothic's appeal to a mass readership. Such assumptions ignore the fascination of Modernism with the everyday and 'the rapidly changing relationship between culture and the quotidian' (*Gothic Modernisms* 1). The Modernist short story transcends these boundaries through a characteristic concern with the liminal.

The 'space between' is typically symbolised in the supernatural tale by literal or metaphorical ghosts such as the 'mummer' in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The



Masque of the Red Death', and the ghost of the child Cathy in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The Modernist genre shows a conformity with tradition through its evident indebtedness to the Gothic, but as Paul March-Russell notes, the ghosts on which these stories centre do not necessarily arise from the realm of metaphysics, but emerge 'from an unfathomable recess of the narrator's mind' (11). Gillian Beer also points to this distinction in her identification of two distinct types of ghost story: 'those which unambiguously present spirits as actual and those which explore the cloistral intensities of a consciousness, leaving us uncertain whether the manifestations have any source beyond the psychological' (Beer 260-1).

The distinction between the natural and the supernatural is not the only boundary transgressed by the Modernist uncanny tradition, however. Fictional and genre definitions are frequently blurred, such as in Woolf's early essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate', and Sinclair's fictional experimentation in her story 'The Finding of the Absolute' of the philosophical theories she explored in her studies of Idealist philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Modernist uncanny tale is associated with the liminal in view of the fact that, as B M Éjexenbaum suggests, the short-story genre in itself marks a transition into written artefact from its origins of oral traditions, folklore and anecdote (81).

A further shift from the 'traditional' to the experimental uncanny tale occurred when the Victorian fascination with the occult began to give way in the early twentieth century to an interest in the newly developing science of psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> In stories by Sinclair and Woolf, there is a frequent juxtaposition of mysticism and the supernatural with the contemporary science of psychoanalysis. Both writers had connections with the latter. The Woolfs' Hogarth Press published some of the earliest papers of the Institute of Psycho Analysis in London from 1924 onwards, including translations of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, and also



four volumes of his *Collected Papers*.<sup>3</sup> Sinclair praised the Society for Psychological Research, to which she was elected in 1914, for its 'admirable work' on dreams and publication of pioneering work by Freud (Raitt 294). On collating her volume of *Uncanny Stories* 1923, Sinclair 'borrowed' its title from Freud's 1919 essay on psychoanalysis in which he postulates the theory of *Das Unheimlich*. Freud's essay claims that the 'uncanny' is 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' ('The Uncanny' 341); the result of something which 'has undergone repression and then returned from it' (ibid 340).

The Freudian *unheimlich* is thus an ambiguous entity, combining mysticism and the supernatural but also different states of consciousness. The transgressing of boundaries by the Modernist uncanny tradition thus suggests that the 'uncanny story' is a more appropriate definition than the more traditional 'ghost story' or supernatural tale. The term 'uncanny' is elusive, as indicated by an anonymous *Saturday Review* article (15 September 1923) on Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories*, which complained that the 'uncanny' of the title was 'misleading' (qtd Robb 200). However, it is precisely this elusiveness which attracted writers like Sinclair and Woolf, in spite of the fact that their attitudes to mysticism, the metaphysical and the uncanny differ markedly. Unlike Sinclair, who treated the after life as a serious area of philosophical study, Woolf was outwardly sceptical of the supernatural and directly critical of Sinclair's 'metaphysical quest'. Woolf wrote to Lady Robert Cecil that Sinclair, whom she met in 1909, 'talked very seriously of her "work"; and ecstatic moods in which she swings (like a spider again) half way to Heaven, detached from earth' (*L* 1 390). This is a palpable reference to Sinclair's ideals of sublimation, which are closely associated with her mysticism as discussed in Chapter 5. The 'ecstatic moods' Sinclair attached closely to the metaphysical philosophy and sublimative values she explored in her work, evidently did not impress Woolf, who also

dismissed with ridicule Dorothy Brett's pretensions to a mystic insight. Brett's claim that her dead friend Katherine Mansfield had 'taken to revisiting the earth' (*D* 2 237), is mocked in Woolf's diary along with Brett's propensity to take the 'old fables' seriously. 'She feels the "contact"', Woolf writes, '& has had revelations; & there she sits [...] brooding over death, and hearing voices ...' (ibid 238).<sup>4</sup>

In spite of her resistance to the idea of mysticism there are nonetheless several senses in which Woolf did embrace this theme in her writing. Her striving after aesthetic unity, as well as her renegotiations of progressive time and concerns with transcendence arguably helped Woolf develop her own individual Modernist aesthetic. In her published memoirs *Moments of Being*, Woolf describes how all her life she received 'sudden shocks' which culminate in a 'revelation of some order' (*MB* 72), which she in turn makes 'real' by putting them into words. She concludes that this shock-receiving capacity, 'the invisible and silent part of my life as a child' (ibid 73), is the attribute which makes her a writer.

Woolf's writings about her mystical experiences in *Moments of Being* have prompted the critic Julie Kane to suggest that Woolf did not convert to a mystical worldview from a sceptical position, but rather 'ceased to deny the authenticity of experiences and perceptions which often paralleled contemporary Theosophical teachings' (328).<sup>5</sup>

According to Suzanne Raitt, mysticism was an area of interest to Modernism in general (*A Modern Victorian* 233n). Whilst no full-length study into the relationship between Modernism and the new mysticism as yet exists, some shorter articles are in print relating to the influence of mysticism primarily on the writings of T S Eliot. Rebecca Kinnamon Neff's article 'New Mysticism' argues that May Sinclair's writings demonstrate a palpable influence on Eliot's mysticism, whilst P S Padmanabhan's 'The Irritant and the Pearl' relates to

'Jones's Karma', another story of Sinclair's on mysticism which was published in Eliot's magazine *The Criterion*.

The close association between psychoanalysis and mysticism in the Modernist uncanny story indicates that whilst Modernism is often viewed as a 'breaking away' from traditional modes of writing, residing within it is what Eliot called a 'conformity between the old and the new' ('Tradition' 15). This calls into question the expected critical celebration of a poet's 'difference from his predecessors'. Eliot argues that the best and most individual aspects of the work of 'mature poets' 'may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously' (ibid 14). For Eliot, 'immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different' ('Philip Massinger' 206). In Modernist uncanny stories, the influence of the earlier Gothic traditions is evident in their overt indebtedness to their literary predecessors. Even in their earliest work, some Modernist writers were beginning to rework the literary forms used by their predecessors. An example of this may be found in the overt indebtedness of Woolf's early essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' (1903) to Edgar Allan Poe's story 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842).

Each of these stories is concerned primarily with the liminal state between such conditions as inside and outside and appearances and reality. 'The Masque of the Red Death' poses an immediate contrast between the setting of the story: a 'castellated abbey' representing 'the security of within', and a cold outside beyond the abbey's walls which is the domain of the Red Death ('Red Death' 269). The abbey in Poe's narrative gives way to a domestic setting in Woolf's, and in 'A Dance in Queen's Gate', unlike 'The Masque of the Red Death', there is no overt apparition. Poe's story has a strong visual impact and is 'dressed' in vivid colours and texture: velvet, the colours of the rooms and the ebony of the clock. Woolf's essay is by contrast devoid of colour and



permeated by dashes which interrupt the smooth flow of the narrative, illustrating the implied changes in tempo within the text: 'the waltz drags a little – the pulse wants vigour – and listen – the church tolls again – one – two' [...] 'The clock is in no hurry – it can wait its tune – no waltzer will outwaltz it ...' (ibid).

The dominant motif of Woolf's essay and Poe's story is the *danse macabre* or dance of death, in which a skeleton leads a throng of people to their graves. The metaphor of the dance of death is noteworthy for its depiction of a surreal, transitional process from life to death, demonstrating Arnold Van Gennep's notion of liminality as a 'transition between'. There is an overt connection made with this process in Mansfield's story 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', in which the character of Constantia sees 'horrible dancing' on a carved screen in the context of death, (CS 284), and in Leila's experience of glimpsing her likely future date at a society dance in 'Her First Ball'.

Poe's earlier story also blurs the distinction between a society gathering and the literal depiction of the *danse macabre*. The revellers who attend Prince Prospero's masked ball in 'The Masque of the Red Death' are depicted as phantoms, thus undermining the apparent opposition between the dancers and the 'mummer', the personified figure of death who appears close to the end of the narrative. None of the protagonists possesses a tangible form. A striking clock interrupts the story at intervals with an ominous tone, a reminder of the passage of time, of life, and of the approach of death. The clock also has the power to stop the phantoms in their tracks, rendering the revellers 'stiff – frozen as they stand' (271), in a parody of the corpse. In the later stages of Woolf's essay, the revellers no longer dance in time to the music, or 'they dance only as pale phantoms because so long as the music sounds they must dance – there is no help for them' ('Dance' 166). The *danse macabre* thus becomes a metaphor of the inexorable progression of life.

As in Poe's story, Woolf's 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' is pervaded by the striking of a clock which interrupts both the dance and the speaker's reverie. The stroke of one o'clock synchronises with the sound of music although it does not belong to the tune but is 'dropped from another world and time [...], not raising its voice above the music, but nevertheless it stands out pure, quite distinct. The whirling valse has not drowned it, it has no power over it' ('Dance' 165). The clock and the changing tempo of the music remind the reader constantly of shifting dimensions of time. Towards the end of the essay these rhythms shift with the effect that the music, 'that seemed to ebb before, has gathered strength – it sounds louder and louder – it swings faster and faster – no one can stop dancing now. They are sucked in by the music' (166-167). The *danse macabre* is here evoked as vividly as in Poe's earlier story, and the dancers are depicted as close to death and helpless in its throes, or, perhaps, as phantoms themselves:

Pale men – fainting women [...] They are no longer masters of the dance – it has taken possession of them. And all joy and life has left it, and it is diabolical, a twisting livid serpent, writhing in cold sweat and agony, and crushing the frail dancers in its contortions. What has brought about the change? It is the dawn (Ibid).

The leaching out of life occurs at a characteristically liminal time. According to Rust's definition, both dawn and midnight are liminal times at which crucial actions take place: 'the twilight of dawn or fading dusk, or else at midnight' (Rust 443). In 'A Dance in Queen's Gate', the moment of passage from one hour to the next is transitional and a time of meditation, whereas the denouement of the story occurs at dawn. At the conclusion of Poe's story, the appearance of the 'red death' at midnight and the subsequent deaths of all the protagonists, red

and black are the dominant images. By contrast, Woolf's essay ends at dawn on the note of all colour and life being leached away: 'the sky is deathly pale – but alive [...] No lamplight can burn in the radiance of that whiteness – no music can sound in the pause of that awful silence. The Dance is over' ('Dance' 167).

In this passage, rather than constituting the antagonist or double, death becomes the 'eerily familiar' wherein lies the essence of the uncanny. The essay suggests that death is not the unknowable 'other': 'the sky is deathly pale, but alive' (ibid); rather, it is an intrinsic part of subjective existence. For this reason, when Prospero, Poe's chief protagonist, attempts to wall out death he succeeds only in creating his own tomb. As demonstrated by the ebony clock, time encroaches in spite of every attempt to defy death. This unraveling of the dichotomy between life and death reveals not only a state of transition between being and non-being, but recognition that life cannot exist without death.

Woolf's early experimentation with the uncanny in 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' illustrates the relationship between the Gothic tradition and the development of the theme of the uncanny in Modernist short fiction. Poe's influence on this early example of Woolf's writing is palpable, and anticipates the representations of the liminal, mysticism and confrontations with death in her later short fiction. Likewise, May Sinclair's representations of the uncanny in her short fiction also focus on liminal themes and there is also a discernible 'rewriting' of the Gothic tradition in her work. Her story 'The Intercessor' (1911) has some close parallels with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The isolated moorland home, the child-ghost clamouring for entry and the nomadic figure of the intercessor feature in both texts.<sup>6</sup> Confrontations with these representations of the uncanny manifest themselves in a condition Freud called the 'eerily familiar' ('The Uncanny' 368). The 'return of the repressed' is the central theme of 'The Intercessor', which concerns a traumatic witnessing of a sexual event by a child-ghost who 'projects' her experiences onto an intermediary. The



intercessor, a 'homeless' wanderer who lodges in others' houses, is an in-between figure whose purpose in both texts is to serve as a linking mechanism between the living present and the ghosts of the past.

The child-ghost of Brontë's central character, Catherine Earnshaw, appears only to Lockwood, whilst the spirit of Effy in 'The Intercessor' manifests itself only to Garvin. Both ghosts are shut out: Catherine's ghost wails to be let in at the window whilst Effy's beats ineffectually on the locked door of her mother's bedroom. Their respective haunted houses contain secrets, according with Joanna Russ's definition of the 'buried ominous secret', usually criminal or sexual in undertone, as a defining characteristic of subsequent fictional reworkings of the Gothic genre (669). 'The Intercessor' and *Wuthering Heights* both contain secrets with unmistakably sexual undertones, and both texts are concerned primarily with the attempts of the intercessors to learn these secrets. Once revealed, they are discovered to centre on a dark and taboo childish sexuality: Catherine's forbidden passion for her adopted half-sibling, Heathcliff, and Effy's desire for her mother's love.

At 7 years of age, Effy is barred by the incest taboo from the body of the mother, Sarah, who rejects her child following her husband's illicit affair. Sarah, gradually growing more despairing of her husband's indifference, blames her daughter and turns her out of her bed, ultimately refusing to have the child near her. The parallels with *Wuthering Heights* are overt here: Catherine dies on the night she is delivered of a child, whereas Sinclair's Sarah Falshaw bears a dead baby. These violent and tragic stories end only when the secrets are revealed and the spirits of Catherine and Heathcliff, and Sarah and Effy respectively, are reconciled.

The intercessor is a significant liminal character. A wanderer and a nomad, Garvin is an intermediary between the spirit of the child Effy and her mother, and stands between the worlds of the living and the dead. Like

Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, Garvin fulfils the role of intermediary between living and dead, and past and present. The figures of Garvin and the child-ghost, Effy, are in this sense personifications of liminality, denoting a place which, paradoxically, is at the centre and margins of the text simultaneously. *The Intercessor* is, in fact, Effy's story; Garvin becomes her intermediary because of his recognition of Effy's purity and passion for her mother. Her suffering endows her with 'indestructible passion', and through Garvin this passion 'clamoured for satisfaction and her suffering for rest' (185). Effy coerces Garvin into bringing about a rapprochement between the ghost and her mother, and the divide between the living and the dead is thus erased.

The apparition and the intercessor are thus liminal characters in *The Intercessor*, which is a psychological story as well as a tale of the supernatural. Ned Lukacher's theory of the 'primal scene' gives an insight into the psychological understanding conveyed in the story that a child's 'witnessing of a sexual act [...] subsequently plays a traumatic role in his or her psycho-sexual life' (Lukacher 24). In 'The Intercessor', this takes on a broader significance. It signifies what Lukacher describes as an 'ontologically undecidable intertextual event', situated in the 'differential space between historical memory and imaginative construction' (ibid). In Sinclair's story, the ego boundaries between the protagonists are erased when the dark secret of the house is revealed. Garvin physically enters the borderland occupied by the ghost, witnessing a sexual act between Mr Falshaw and his mistress through the eyes of Effy:

He couldn't say what it was he saw, but he knew that it was evil. [...] It was monstrous, unintelligible; it lay outside the order of his experience. He seemed in this shifting of his brain, to have parted with his experience, to have become a creature of vague memory and appalling fear (163).

The primal scene may therefore be seen to apply to a broader context than the tragic story of the dead Effy. Garvin himself has 'been taken into the invisible places, into the mystic heart of suffering. He knew the unnamed, unnameable secret of pity and fear. These things had become the substance of his innermost self' (182). Garvin literally 'internalises' the haunting and enters into a psychological borderland, which he grows increasingly to fear, knowing that 'if the things that were *there* became visible they would be more than he could endure' (145). This hinterland is the place which Sarah, Onny and Falshaw already occupy. Living in a house haunted by the secrets of their own pasts, for which Effy's ghost is the metaphor, each inhabitant of the Falshaw house lives 'on the edge of the borderland of fear, discovering nothing clearly, yet knowing all' (161).

The question of the relationship between surface and hinterland is crucial here, and again this demonstrates the centrality of the liminal trope to Modernist uncanny fiction. According to Freud, the unconscious is largely unknowable although, as Punter points out, we can know things that rise to consciousness. It is therefore possible to hypothesise 'a hinterland whence these things emerge, even though its detailed topography may be a matter of great difficulty' (Punter 48). This hinterland is the betwixt and between state of liminality, which demonstrates its paradoxical capacity for liberation and marginalisation. In 'The Intercessor', this borderland contains a dark and terrible tragedy, but is nonetheless a locus of power. Towards the end of the text it is revealed that 'from that tale, half savage, half sordid, from that tragedy of the Falshaws, from that confusion of sombre lusts and unclean, carnal miseries, there emerged the figure of the child, Effy, tender, luminous, spiritual, unspeakably loveable, and pure' (183). Effy's passion, the entity Sinclair sees as 'eternal' as demonstrated in her philosophical writings possesses Garvin and it is this, rather than the



apparition itself, that is supernatural. The 'possessing, pursuing, unappeasably crying thing' (193) which haunts and torments the Falshaws is what makes entry into the psychic borderland possible.

Originally appearing in the 8 July 1911 edition of the *English Review*, 'The Intercessor' is one of Sinclair's first supernatural tales. Similarly, Woolf's essay 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' marks one of her earliest experiments in supernatural prose. Clearly, the influences for both stories came from the Gothic tradition and the writings of their predecessors. However, whilst the earlier texts merely begin to deconstruct the dichotomy between life and death, the 'ghost that haunts' becomes, in these later uncanny stories, representative of the protagonists' own psyches. The texts are psychological, but also include metaphysical concepts and still leave open the possibility of traditional, 'supernatural' interpretations.

In 'A Dance in Queen's Gate' and 'The Intercessor', Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair may thus be seen to have adopted Eliot's suggested method of 'stealing' the work of their literary predecessors and making it into 'something different' ('Philip Massinger' 206). The texts demonstrate a clear indebtedness to the Gothic tradition. Characterised by the precedent of a gloomy castle as its setting and typified by sensational, supernatural elements, in later variations the term 'Gothic' came to mean a fictional genre designated by a brooding atmosphere and often representing uncanny events or aberrant psychological states (Abrams 78).<sup>7</sup> Included among these are Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-61). David Punter's two-volume general study of the Gothic tradition entitled *The Literature of Terror* presents a chronological and thematic analysis of the gothic tradition. The study analyses the early Gothic writers, Gothic romanticism and early American Gothic fiction, and includes the theme of decadence in Oscar Wilde, H G Wells and Bram Stoker, and the ambivalence of memory in Henry

James and Walter de la Mare. *The Literature of Terror* also examines the connections between the Gothic tradition and Modernism, exploring the in-between status of the liminal in the Gothic tradition and arguing that a half-imaginable future rather than a tradition of writing 'haunts' Modernism itself.

In their rewritings of this specific pattern in a 'Modernist' way, Sinclair and Woolf demonstrate Eliot's view of the mature poet reworking consciously the literature of his or her predecessors into new forms and traditions. In an essay entitled '*Ulysses, Order and Myth*' Eliot praises this method in Joyce's rewriting of Homer's *Odyssey*. According to Eliot, 'in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators' ('*Ulysses*' 167). In building on a literary tradition in this way, Sinclair's and Woolf's stories also demonstrate Eliot's contention that when the new work arrives, 'the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered'. This, suggests Eliot, is the conformity between the old and the new, and according to him the literary past is altered by its present, 'as much as the present is directed by the past' ('Tradition', 15). This substantiates March-Russell's contention that the ghost story was 'in transition' post-1918, becoming what he calls a 'seed bed' for literary Modernism (21).

The Modernist uncanny story thus bridges the divide between the occult and contemporary sciences, as well as the divisions between the linear progressive narratives of the Victorian era and the fragmentary and impressionistic experimental styles of Modernism. It also formed an essential aspect of May Sinclair's Modernism. As Rebecca Kinnanon-Neff has noted, Sinclair's metaphysical quest is a search for the unified reality that forms the basis of her aesthetic. In contrast to Woolf's professed scepticism and gradual embracing of mystical themes, May Sinclair firmly believed that 'reality' was of a spiritual constitution. Her ultimate rejection of Anglicanism in favour of idealism,

spiritualism and mysticism informed and influenced her writings of the uncanny. This palpable and painful struggle, involving a good deal of personal sacrifice, may be traced through her personal correspondence and her semi-autobiographical novel *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919).<sup>8</sup>

As Neff has argued, Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* illustrate the different stages of her personal quest for an ultimate reality ('Metaphysical Quest', 187). The stories illustrate the philosophical beliefs Sinclair explored at length in her two books on Idealist philosophy: *A Defence of Idealism* (1917) and *The New Idealism* (1922), and appear to be a fictional testing ground for the Idealist philosophy which attracted her. The uncanny story provides the ideal medium for Sinclair's experimentation with her radical quest for a 'reality' without God, as well as her experimentation with new narrative methods through which to convey this 'reality'.

In *A Defence of Idealism*, Sinclair insists that 'the end goal of the metaphysical quest has been mainly one ultimate principle' (332): the assumption of an underlying truth. This is a common aspect of the Modernist aesthetic although, as Michèle Barrett has noted, the concepts of truth, freedom, integrity and vision the Modernists accepted unquestioningly might now be regarded as problematic in their assumptions about aesthetic judgement and subjective identity ('Introduction', *AROO/TG* xxi). Poststructuralist theory later denied the existence of a unified reality or 'transcendental signified' in favour of a view of 'meaning' as a continual slippage. For Sinclair, however, the reality of the Absolute is contained in the life after the death of the 'perfected self', which she views as a serious philosophical concept.

'The Finding of the Absolute', the last in the *Uncanny Stories* sequence, appears as a fictional demonstration of the theories which inspired Sinclair's metaphysical quest. The main protagonist, James Spalding, is a student of idealist philosophy who is unable to reconcile the purity of metaphysical truth



with the squalor and corruption he sees on earth. When his wife leaves him for an Imagist poet, Spalding is less shocked by her betrayal and infidelity than by his simultaneous loss of belief in the Absolute. He reasons that if Elizabeth and her lover, Paul Jefferson, existed in the Absolute unchanged, then so, too, must their adultery, and 'an adultery within the Absolute outraged his moral sense as much as anything he had been told about God in his youth' (US 227). However, as Spalding later discovers, the ideal of heaven offered by the Absolute disregards earthly sins.

Sinclair's story thus counters the 'moral' issues and conventional attitudes to morality commonly if erroneously attributed to Victorian literature, and which orthodox contemporary periodicals such as *Punch* and the *Saturday Review* tended to uphold. For her, human failings, unlike the ideals of beauty, truth and love symbolised by such characters as Effy in 'The Intercessor', are not eternal. Jefferson, the lover of Spalding's estranged wife, indicates to Spalding that his inability to reconcile his wife's infidelity with the concept of the Absolute has been based on a set of value-judgements which cause him to assume that he has joined the adulterers in hell. On the contrary, as Jefferson explains it, 'Your parochial morality doesn't hold good here, that's all. [...] It's entirely relative [...] to a social system with limits in time and space' (ibid 230).

When Spalding finds himself dying, he does not attempt to repress the memory of his past affairs amid fears of the ramifications for his after life. He can imagine 'no worse hell than the eternal repetition of [...] of boredom and disgust. Fancy going on with Connie Larkins for ever and ever [...] And, if there was an absolute, if there was truth, reality, never knowing it; being cut off from it forever -' (229).

This is precisely the fate which befalls Harriott Leigh, the protagonist of 'Where their Fire is not Quenched' which appears first in the *Uncanny Stories* sequence. Examined together, these two stories demonstrate the extremes of

success and failure in the reunion of the spirit with the Absolute. Spalding succeeds for two reasons: firstly his love of 'truth', and secondly because he is able to reconcile himself to his 'sins' in life. He acknowledges them openly and fears their implications for his after life, whereas Harriott seeks to suppress them and has no insight into a quest for truth. Another key difference between the two characters is that Harriott attempts to make amends for her sin by embracing a life of religious piety. Spalding, on the other hand, 'had flung over the God he had been taught to believe in because besides being an outrage to Mr Spalding's moral sense, he wasn't metaphysical enough' (226).

Harriott lacks the capacity to strive after spiritual insight and is thus condemned to an eternal repetition of her sin of adultery. After bodily death, she continues to be tormented by guilt in a purgatorial borderland, a suffocating and deadly state from which escape is impossible. By contrast, for Spalding the borderland marks a state of transition in the reunion of the spirit with the Absolute. It is Spalding's meeting with Kant in this post-death state which finally answers the question which had disturbed and perplexed him throughout his earthly life. 'Kant' claims that to talk of evil and pain existing in the Absolute unchanged is irrelevant, as to do so is to think of pain and evil 'in terms of one dimension of time and three dimensions of space, by which they are indefinitely multiplied' (243).

'The Finding of the Absolute' thus demonstrates a link between mysticism and psychoanalysis, following Freud's reasoning that discoveries in the field of psychoanalysis enabled fresh light to be shed on Kant's theories that space and time are 'necessary forms of thought'. In exploring the relations between the dimensions of space and time, Sinclair indicates in *A Defence of Idealism* that the Reality she is looking for is not the necessity 'to go out and look for multiplicity and change when you have got them all around you. I want to know what, if anything, lies behind or at the bottom of multiplicity and change'

(344). In 'The Finding of the Absolute', Sinclair attempts a fictional response to this question by creating a world in which her protagonists create their own space and time in their wills and imagination.

Once Spalding's understanding and quest for truth is satisfied, his sense of time and space undergoes another shift where all space and time amalgamates into one state. The experience is depicted as an expansion of space, time and perception. Scenes in history and areas of the world converge into a simultaneous state, in which Spalding sees 'space and time systems rising up, toppling, enclosing and enclosed. His own life becomes 'a tiny inset in the immense scene, and is viewed as a simultaneous entity 'from birth to the present moment, together with the events of his heavenly life to come' (*US* 246-247). After Spalding's bodily death, the convergence of space and time into new dimensions becomes a pivotal aspect of the story.

This substitution of space for time is not only a central tenet of Sinclair's metaphysical quest but also, as Sandra Kemp has noted, a characteristic of feminist modern fiction. In 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched', the figure of Harriott Leigh faces the same scenario as Spalding does, but with the opposite outcome. Harriott typifies the ordinary, unspectacular figure and the spectre of the ordinary. This Being proliferates in Modernist literature in varying forms: Joyce's anti-hero Leopold Bloom, Eliot's elderly and sexually frustrated J Alfred Prufrock, and Woolf's Mrs Brown, the ordinary, impoverished woman in the railway carriage who appears in her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' are noteworthy examples. Likewise, Harriott Leigh is the epitome of ordinariness and possibly also a prototype for Harriet Fream in Sinclair's novella of that title. Harriott performs no great deeds, she does not marry or become a mother, and her love affairs are unrealised or unsatisfactory. She denies her passions even to herself and ultimately veils them under a cloak of orthodoxy and piety. Her only two acts of rebellion are not following the expected course of marriage and



motherhood, and later having an affair with a married man whom she does not love.

In this story exist no spiritual moments of revelation such as can be found elsewhere in Sinclair's writings and in the stories of Richardson, Woolf and Mansfield. Instead, Sinclair examines liminality in all its negative ramifications, exposing the stultifying effects of patriarchy and, indeed, of feminism, on the ordinary, unrebellious woman. The story embodies the various generations of 'women's time' that Julia Kristeva was later to theorise in her essay of that title, in which she explores the significance of space and time for feminism.<sup>9</sup>

The reworking of space and time in terms of psychoanalysis and metaphysical philosophy is the crux of May Sinclair's Modernism. Her stories pre-empt Kristeva's theory although, importantly, Sinclair recognises the negative as well as the positive ramifications. In 'Where their Fire is not Quenched', she explores liminality by juxtaposing cursive temporality with an all-encompassing post-death spatial alternative. Sinclair also makes the connection with death, exploring the theme through her metaphysical philosophy and the dimension of the uncanny. The transition between life and death, which occurs almost exactly half way through the story, symbolises rupture, partings and rituals of passage. At this point the text conveys an after-death space-time, exploring the implications of a life of repression on the ordinary protagonist.

The story begins with the ending of Harriott Leigh's first unconsummated love affair. She accepts a proposal of marriage but her father refuses his consent, telling her she must wait three years. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the passing of time in the earlier half of the story. A clock signals the time of Harriott's and her fiancé George's parting: 'Across the yellow fields of charlock they heard the village clock strike seven. Up in the house, a gong clanged' (10). Shortly after their parting, George's ship sinks resulting in

his death. The story resumes after a five-year interval, and then again, following Harriott's second unconsummated love affair, after a further ten years. This part of the narrative is acutely aware of the passing of time, and is strictly ordered in a linear sequence of events, thus remaining faithful to 'cursive' time.

Harriott's only consummated love affair is unsatisfactory and rooted in a self-effacing masochism which ultimately causes her to give up Oscar Wade because she does not particularly want him, only to discover that 'she wanted him furiously, perversely, because she had given him up' (15). An encounter at the Hotel Saint Pierre in Montmartre seals Harriott's and Oscar's dissatisfaction with the affair. Each is bored with the other. They remain in love for just three days. At the end of the tenth day, Harriott cries in frustration out of 'pure boredom' (18), and by the end of the second week she doubts whether she had ever been really in love with him (*ibid*). The inevitable end of the affair is fraught with bitterness. Harriott accuses Oscar: 'love for you only means one thing. Everything that's high and noble in it you dragged down to that, till there's nothing left for us but that' (21). Harriott is unable to admit to Oscar's exhortation: 'At least you might own we had a good time while it lasted' (*ibid*). She protests only that 'the clean, beautiful part of it', the part / wanted' (20), had been denied her.

When Oscar dies, three years after the 'rupture' of the affair, Harriott attempts to expunge the memory by immersing herself in a life of religious piety. This life, however, is depicted in terms only of its paraphernalia: 'the semi-religious gown, the cloak, the bonnet and veil, the cross, the rosary, the holy smile' (21-2). The story makes a careful distinction between the outward appearance of sanctity - the clothes and trappings of religion - and spiritual, pure 'reality. Throughout this period Harriott tries to suppress her memories of Oscar, as these would have 'clashed disagreeably with the reputation for sanctity which she had now acquired' (21). As a deaconess, she experiences ecstasy from

receiving the Sacrament. In her last rites, however, she consciously chooses to omit Oscar Wade from her confession and in her afterlife is thus forced to relive the physical rather than the spiritual part of her existence. The physical aspect of her subjectivity is the part which, in life, she had loathed and tried to suppress.

Harriott's death halfway through the story serves as a rupturing mechanism and the post-death latter half of the narrative subverts the linear sequence. This point of the story is open to the interpretation of a physical bodily death. The protagonist literally goes through the process of dying and experiences a spatial afterlife as psychological borderland which, in accordance with Sinclair's idealist theories, signifies a failure of the reunion of the spirit with the Absolute. In a psychological reading, the 'death' of Harriott may be interpreted as a metaphorical event, the result of the potentially stultifying effects of socially constructed, patriarchal linear temporality on an ordinary female subject who is tormented by guilt over her one act of rebellion. The experience of this 'death' is depicted as spatial, and Harriott's mind becomes an entity with no past, future or coherent memories:

suddenly, the room began to come apart before her eyes, to split into the shafts of floor and furniture and ceiling that shifted and were thrown by their commotion into different planes. They leaned slanting at every possible angle; they crossed and overlaid each other with a transparent mingling of dislocated perspectives (24).

The amalgamation of space and time in this passage demonstrates Gaston Bachelard's theory that rather than living in the largely social construct of a structured, ordered notion of linear progressive time, 'all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability ...' (*Poetics of Space* 8). In



Harriott's post-death state, her worst fears of life are realised in a surreal, purgatorial after-death space without the prospect of release. Here the negative implications of liminality are fully exposed. Haunted by her invasive memories of Oscar, Harriott mistakenly assumes that she is moving backward in time and that if she can return to the innocence of childhood she will be 'safe, out of Oscar's reach' (US 80). At this stage, she believes Oscar to be a separate entity, not realising that he forms a part of her own psyche and that his memory is intrinsic to her spiritual existence.

In a similar argument to that pursued by Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Oscar ultimately points out to Harriott that the future can affect the past as well as vice versa. Harriott then learns the full horror of her situation; she and Oscar are doomed to be 'one flesh and one spirit, one sin repeated for ever and ever; spirit loathing flesh, flesh loathing spirit; you and I loathing each other' (37). Death becomes in this sense a grotesque consummation of the marriage Harriott had dreaded. The backward flight of her spirit leads her to one memory because, as Oscar's spirit informs her, 'in your innocence there was the beginning of your sin. You were what you were to be' (36). This part of the narrative subverts the linear time of the first section as an illusory, socially constructed phenomenon. Harriott's state in this latter section has no time. She remembers time but has forgotten altogether what it was like. She fixes events in her own mind 'by the place they occupied and measured their duration by the space she went through' (28-9). This constitutes more than simply a backward slide. Harriott gradually learns that 'all space and time were here' (ibid). Sandra Kemp's conclusion on Harriott's predicament is the depressing realisation of how difficult it can be 'for women (or "feminists") to possess their own consciousness in peace' (Kemp 113). 'Where Their fire is not Quenched' shows most overtly of all Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* that liminality is, first and foremost, a site of transition and to remain trapped within this state condemns

the protagonist to a purgatorial psychological borderland. This suggests a subversion of essentialist notions of femininity, and poses an implicit challenge to the feminist theories advocating sexual 'difference'. The story is a warning of the potential pitfalls of denial and is a strongly subversive text.

As uncanny stories, 'The Finding of the Absolute' and 'Where their Fire is not Quenched' clearly deviate from the traditional form of the 'ghost story'. Rather than depicting literal 'hauntings' by an overt apparition, these two stories involve literal or metaphorical death as a liminal process, demonstrating Freud's contention that the essence of the *unheimlich* is generally experienced in relation to 'death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts' ('The Uncanny' 364). The connection between mysticism and psychoanalysis here points to the emphasis placed on liminality in the Modernist uncanny story, in which the sensation of the eerily familiar is pivotal.

In the Modernist uncanny story, the ghost frequently appears as a metaphor for ambiguity, denoting confrontations with images of death which are fraught with 'uncanny strangeness'. The figure of the ghost is a metaphor for borderlands. As Elisabeth Bronfen points out in *Over Her Dead Body*, the ghost hovers in a liminal zone, 'staging a duplicitous presence, at once the sign of an absence and of an inaccessible other scene, of a beyond' (116). This in-between status conceivably relates to a bridging mechanism between the worlds Zygmunt Bauman identifies as the orderly, socially constructed world and a 'contingent world of randomness, in which human survival weapons - memory, the capacity for learning - would be useless' (Bauman 1).

The notion of language as embodying this bridging mechanism is discussed in Chapter 4. In the context of the uncanny, as the 'ghost' occupies a similar position in the space between order and chaos, the familiar and the unknown, it is also a conceivable metaphor for language, which, as Bauman argues, embodies the essence of the liminal. Virginia Woolf's story 'The

Mysterious Case of Miss V' draws attention to this 'ghostliness' of language, which in turn draws attention to the uncanny aspects of subjectivity itself. The story centres on an unnamed first-person narrator who is fascinated by the elusive presence of Miss Mary V. Mary V has a sister named Janet V, but these women are elusive and form two halves of the same person: 'Miss V, in which initial, be it understood is concealed the person also of Miss Janet V: it is hardly necessary to split the one letter into two parts' (HH 30). Miss V is also a plausible aspect of the narrator's subjectivity: 'A tie of blood, or whatever the fluid was that ran in Miss V's veins – made it my particular fate to run against her, or pass through her or dissipate her, whatever the phrase may be' (31).

This suggests that Miss V is emblematic of something more than a single persona. She symbolises the marginal figure of the spinster who is relegated to an 'outsider' position in society: 'There is no loneliness like that of one who finds himself alone in a crowd' (30). The presence of Miss V herself in the text is fleeting and ghostly. She has been 'gliding about London for some fifteen years', encounters others superficially, and then 'melt[s] into some armchair or chest of drawers' (ibid). Miss V never asserts her own discourse but appears as a 'shadow' which haunts the narrator. Her 'voice' within the text is unidentifiable, and she appears in the story as flitting between the oppositions of subject and object, life and death, absence and presence.

Lukacher makes reference to such an entity within language: 'a silent, unidentifiable voice in the text that is always pre-given, prior to the oppositions of identity and difference, subject and object, a mark, a trace, a trait, a *retrait* in the text that veils itself, withdraws into itself, and forgets all about itself' (Lukacher 61-2). As May Sinclair points out in *A Defence of Idealism* 'one point must have struck the unmetaphysical reader, as it certainly strikes the mere writer: that a good half of the problems under consideration arose solely from the limitations of language' (346). Miss V is a personification of a liminal character who hovers



on the margins of the text, and yet, paradoxically, remains central to the story. In this sense, the story is uncanny in that it sets fixed frames and margins in motion within the text. Elisabeth Bronfen theorises this liminal condition as 'uncanny'. In Bronfen's view, the 'trace' is a condition in which it is impossible to determine whether 'something is animate (alive) or inanimate (dead), whether something is real or imagined, unique, original or a repetition' (Bronfen 113). This is the case with Woolf's elusive protagonist. When her ghost disappears from the text, others at the periphery of the narrative fail to notice. The effect of this on the narrator's wish to assert her own presence in the world is immediate. 'I think I will knock over a chair at this moment', she states, 'now the lodger beneath knows I am alive at any rate' (*HH* 30).

Moreover, when Miss V disappears from the text even the narrator of Miss V's 'case' does not notice initially and comprehends the absence only gradually: 'I will not exaggerate and say that I knew *she* was missing, but there is no insincerity in using the neuter term' (ibid 31). In this sense, the figure of Miss V becomes the emblem of an ambivalent distinction identified by Bronfen as an immediate, 'literally self-present' body, and the representation of the 'figural' body 'signifying through the interplay of absence and presence' (Bronfen 113). The ghostly presence of Miss V hovers in a state of liminality. She is neither present within nor wholly absent from the text. The narrator declares her intention 'to track down the shadow, to see where she lived and if she lived, and talk to her as though she were a person like the rest of us!' (*HH* 31). All attempts are futile, however, because Miss V herself is liminal. She flits on the margins of the text and her society and the narrator begins to wonder 'if shadows could die, and how one buried them' (32).

On arrival at Miss V's flat the same impression of her is received: 'on the signboard I found it stated ambiguously [...] that she was both out and in' (ibid). It is on the threshold of Miss V's home that the narrator learns from a maid of

her quarry's death. Thus the 'meaning' of the story remains ambiguous. Significantly, therefore, the text ends on the threshold. The liminal state which has pervaded the story throughout and 'haunted' the text, is its only possible conclusion. Miss V is without place, although central to the text. She is a personification of a presence and simultaneous absence. Miss V is an ephemeral trace, denoting the shadowy realm between presence and absence, life and death, and past and present. This trace is the essence of the uncanny, the 'ghost' in the text, within language, and within subjectivity itself.

The notion of the intrinsic relationship of death to the living subject, and the idea of death as the 'eerily familiar', is central to the experiments of Modernist women short story writers. Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* interrogate the confrontation with death through psychoanalytic theory and idealist philosophy. Through her fictional 'metaphysical quest', Sinclair challenges ordered notions of space, time and subjectivity, and continually strives for aesthetic unity in the form of an underlying 'reality'. Woolf herself expressed a similar striving for reality in her Modernist aesthetic. In her *Writer's Diary*, she expressed a desire to develop an aesthetic which removed 'the horrible activity of the mind's eye', presenting things instead 'without attachment from the outside' and thus creating 'a sense of burden removed; pretence and make-believe and unreality gone' (WD 138).

Woolf's 1921 short story 'A Haunted House' achieves this effect by indicating the shadowy realm of the familiar liminal locus of the Modernist uncanny story. The use of language and the states of mind depicted in the story are ambiguous, focusing on an area which is literally neither here nor there. The story centres on an unfruitful search, although it is unclear exactly who is searching or for what. The search for the unnamed 'it' or the 'buried treasure' is a dual entity and there is ambiguity over the ownership of the 'it'. In the

concluding lines, the sleeper wakes and cries: 'is this *your* buried treasure?' (*HH* 117).

Here the deliberate emphasis on the word 'your' draws attention to the ego boundaries between the subjects, emphasising the uncanny aspects of space, time, language and being. The story also draws attention to the inherent 'ghostliness' of subjectivity itself. A sceptical anonymous contributor to *The Cornhill* asserts that the greatest difficulty of all is 'determining how far it is reasonable or likely that any of the common ideas about the supernatural have any basis of fact whatsoever' ('Notes on Ghosts and Goblins', *Cornhill* Vol XXVII, 1873, 451). On the other hand, Virginia Woolf, herself a frequent critic of the uncanny genre, challenges the assumption that 'hauntings' in supernatural stories should be taken literally. In her 1918 review 'Across the Border', Woolf attributes the increase in the abundance of the 'psychical' ghost story to 'the fact that our sense of our own ghostliness has much quickened' (219).<sup>10</sup>

'A Haunted House' opens in a familiar liminal site of modernity: at the threshold. 'Whatever hour you woke' the narration begins, 'there was a door shutting' (*Haunted House*, 116). The 'ghosts' always hover between rooms and states: 'Nearer they came; cease at the doorway' (*ibid*). They are elusive, and the sites of liminality which they inhabit: thresholds, doors, windows, never reveal them, but reflect only images: 'the shadow of a thrush crossed the carpet' (*ibid* 116), 'the apples, roses and leaves in the garden – "death was the glass"' (*ibid*). These reflections are fleeting and subject to change with time and light. Significantly, these dissipate when the sleeper wakes abruptly having envisioned her imagined ghosts as 'faces that search the sleepers and seek their hidden joy' (117). If 'the light in the heart' suggests joy or life sustenance, the ghosts are representative of the death which no life is sustainable without. There is ambiguity in the phrases 'the light in the heart' and the 'buried treasure'



which suggest not a dichotomy between life and death but an ambiguous liminal zone.

Gaston Bachelard's theories in *The Poetics of Space* are significant here. The 'haunted house' is a pivotal image of the supernatural tale and Bachelard suggests this image as a 'tool of analysis' for the human soul. Drawing on the theories of C J Jung for this metaphor, Bachelard argues that 'house images are in us as much as we are in them', and provide 'a veritable principle of psychological interrogation'. The questions raised from this are significant: 'how can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past?' (Bachelard xxxvii).

In this sense, the traditional motif of the haunted house becomes a metaphor for the memory trope which links the ghosts of the past to the present. In a coalescence of traditional settings and images with the Modernist challenge to conventional space and time, the motif of the house takes on a further significance as a metaphor for the human subject. As Woolf's narrative progresses, the subjectivity of the protagonist recedes, suggesting a deeper immersion in the unconscious, whilst the house takes on life-like characteristics that the 'ghostly' figures of the couple and the narrator lack. The rhythmic beat of the pulse of the house: 'safe, safe, safe', carries similar echoes of the encroaching of time on life as the striking clock in 'A Dance in Queen's Gate'.

The 'pulse' of the house suggests life, but each time the 'treasure' is thought to have been found, the beat stops abruptly. The speaker recedes into her dream whilst the house takes on the characteristics of life: 'The doors go shutting in the distance, gently knocking like the pulse of a heart' (117). The house itself is breathing and alive, but the secrets buried within it are impermeable. As in the story of Miss V, as well as in the elusive nature of the epiphany, meaning is never fixed. The pulse stops short and the syntax breaks down whenever we get closer to the treasure, and the ego boundaries between

the ghostly subjects of the story, both living and dead, are never sharply defined. The language is elusive, consisting in part of short, fragmented sentences and ellipses. The dichotomy between past and present is blurred in the liminal entity between sleep and consciousness, life and death, memory and language.

The metaphor of the haunted house is significant in relation to the 'ghostliness' of language. Wallace and Smith also offer an interpretation of the haunted house which mirrors Woolf's treatment of this issue in her story:

in the very act of making the house anew, of refurnishing it, of bringing it to new life, the life it used to have and the ghosts it used to harbour have not been banished or exiled but have instead been sealed into a crypt in the very heart of the domestic (*Gothic Modernisms* 17).<sup>11</sup>

The buried memories contained within the metaphorical crypt of the domestic setting remain elusive, suggesting that the liminal site they occupy is in itself an aspect of the uncanny. The shadowy realm of the unconscious is depicted through the narrator's dreams, in which the ghosts, as representative of this liminal state, serve as a linking mechanism between the present and the lost past. As metaphors for memory, liminality and the 'uncanny', the ghosts expose the uncanny aspect of language itself. This concern is discernible throughout the text in the form of the broken syntax adopted by Woolf, which is similar to that used by Mansfield to denote the experience of the epiphany. Continual pronoun shifts destabilise the relations between the narrator and the ghostly couple:

But it wasn't you that woke us. Oh no. 'They're looking for it; they're drawing the curtain', one might say, and so read on a page or two. 'Now they've found it', one would be certain, stopping the pencil on the margin

[...] 'What did I come in here for? What did I want to find? My hands were empty' (*HH* 116).

The discourse of the speaker here merges with that of the ghosts whose conversation she overhears, dreams, or imagines. The sentences are fragmented and the absence of quotation marks serves to erode the boundaries between the living and the dead. The narrator's use of 'one' in this dialogue with the reader 'recedes', as Wallace and Smith have noted, into the third-person 'they'. This deferral of linguistic reference, in Wallace and Smith's argument, 'naturalises ghost-hunting into a search for something forgotten or left behind which the very discourse of the sketch can only gesture towards' (49). Thus the instability of images, language and the notions of space and time in themselves remain elusive: the 'it', perhaps, which is the objective of the fruitless search in the story.

In Woolf's poetic short story, the search continually draws attention to the spaces within language. As Lukacher has pointed out, the poetic essence of language constitutes 'a concealment that normally remains concealed' (23-4). The uncanny is appropriate as a medium for exploring this condition as it is unnameable, avoiding the constraints imposed by naming. 'Uncanniness' is a liminal entity, on the border between what is capable of expression, and what remains beyond it. In itself, language bears within itself its own ghostly 'traces' and is a form of the uncanny in itself. To search, as the text acknowledges, is to pose a question that remains unanswerable, and the repetition of such questions constitutes the 'ghostliness' inherent within language itself.

An interrogation of Modernist short story writers' experimentation with the uncanny shows that this genre was an important contributor to the development of literary Modernism. Although the Modernist uncanny tradition represented a breaking away from the traditional mould of the ghost story, the Modernist



version takes its defining principles from the Gothic tradition and branches out in typically experimental ways. The Modernist uncanny blurs the boundaries between spoken and unspoken, presence and absence, life and death; thus acting as what Punter calls 'the harbinger of the "silencing-forever"' (Punter 191). Liminality further connects Modernism with the Gothic genre in view of the fascination of both genres with the tomb, the crypt and premature burial (ibid). The liminal trope offers an insight into borderline states and emotional conditions which, as a contemporary critic of Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* describes it, are 'really unworthy and superficial but are suddenly gifted with eternity' (Roberts 32).

The concept of the *Unheimlich* provides a fictional space which enables a glimpse into the subversive condition of liminality, and shows how a living present can be altered and developed by the 'dead past' of Modernism's literary ancestry. As Eliot suggests, in a similar vein to that of Sinclair's Oscar Wade, the literary past 'should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past', ('Tradition' 15) and 'the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted' (ibid). Bauman's 'incessant march forward' of modernity simultaneously rejects and embraces the past whilst remaining dissatisfied with it as an 'always already' obsolete presence (10). The uncanny tradition offers a unique insight into how the relation between these genres contributed towards the development of literary Modernism's own uncanny tradition.

The concept of the Modernist ghost story as a longstanding tradition is apparently contradictory within a movement or series of movements with the primary objective of making it new. However, as Eliot points out, when a new artefact is created something 'happens simultaneously to all works of art which preceded it' ('Tradition' 15). In the tradition of the uncanny stories, Cox and Gilbert suggest that the receding past became a focus for the anxiety of the

moderns. The ghost story offered a way of anchoring the past to an unsettled present by 'operating in a continuum of life and death' (Cox & Gilbert ix). Through the uncanny story, Modernism utilises mysticism, metaphysics and the psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny to forge links between the 'real' world and the realm of the imaginary; between a living present and a dead past.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'The Finding of the Absolute' contains a précis of the Kantian theories of space, time and consciousness. Dreams, Sinclair suggests, constitute the experience of 'a world created by each person for himself in a space and time of his own' (US 240), and hence transcend the 'ordinary' or accepted conditions of space and time. Sinclair's story further suggests that only by an arbitrary system of mathematical conventions are such private times and spaces co-ordinated to form the appearance of one universe (US 240).

<sup>2</sup> Diana Basham's *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* offers an analysis of the connection between the Occult and the 'woman question'.

<sup>3</sup> See Gaither, Introduction to *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press* (xxx).

<sup>4</sup> In 1918 Woolf's *Diary* conveyed a similar attitude when she wrote of a visit by John Mills Whitham, who talked to her of spiritualism, 'had dabbled in mysticism, & had made tables waltz & heard phantom raps & believed it all' (D 1 114).

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the catalyst for the change was the 'authentication' of mystic experiences by the poet W B Yeats, whom Woolf met and spoke with at length at the home of Lady Ottoline Morrell on 7 November 1930. According to Woolf's diary entry for the following day, Yeats had spoken to her of states of the soul, creation, the necessity of tragedy, conflict, civilisation, dreaming in colour and its relationship to the unconsciousness. Kane concludes from this that Woolf, for the first time in her life, had met a fellow-artist that 'she could respect as an artistic genius and intellect who fully embraced his own "mystical feelings"' (See Kane, Julie, 'Varieties of Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf' 328).

<sup>6</sup> The characters of Garwin and Lockwood feature as intermediaries in 'The Intercessor' and *Wuthering Heights* respectively. The Brontës' lives and writings appealed to Sinclair's preoccupation with the uncanny and the supernatural and she wrote their biography, entitled *The Three Brontës*, in 1912. The connection between *Wuthering Heights* and 'The Intercessor' has been noted by Sinclair's biographer, Suzanne Raitt (*A Modern Victorian* 132). Wallace and Smith also describe 'The Intercessor' as a retelling of *Wuthering Heights* (*Gothic Modernisms* 54).

<sup>7</sup> According to Abrams, the Gothic tradition from which the Modern Gothic and Modernist uncanny story grew was inaugurated by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), and other early examples include William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). Joanna Russ's article on the 'Modern Gothic', identifies a later fictional genre modelled on the original Gothic as a 'crossbreed of *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*' (Russ 666). Russ identifies the elements of this genre as including a 'large brooding house, a naive heroine, a sardonic 'Super-Male' and an 'other woman' (667-668). Gilbert and Gubar's 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' also identifies the Gothic tradition as 'the archetypal scenario for all those mildly thrilling romantic encounters between a scowling Byronic hero (who owns a gloomy mansion) and a trembling heroine (who can't quite figure out the mansion's floor plan)' (337).

<sup>8</sup> A series of letters to Sinclair from her mentor, Henry Melville Gwatkin, Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, shows a sustained effort on Gwatkin's part to 'convert' Sinclair back to Christianity. Sinclair, although she remained



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close to Gwatkin, resisted these efforts and the correspondence gradually peters out after she finally turned from Christianity to philosophical idealism. Sinclair's side of the correspondence has not survived.

<sup>9</sup> Kristeva defines her use of the term 'generation' as implying 'less a chronology than a *signifying space*, a both corporeal and desiring mental space' ('Women's Time' 209). Kristeva juxtaposes two schools of feminism: first-wave, which resisted essentialist gender definitions and demanded an equal place for women within linear temporality, which she deems masculine. The second generation, emerging after 1968, insisted on sexual difference and emphasised women's right to remain *outside* the masculine time of politics and history. A third generation is nonetheless conceivable which includes 'the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other' (209).

<sup>10</sup> Woolf's reviews of uncanny fiction included 'Across the Border' (1918), a review of Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, 'Gothic Romance' (1921), a review of Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* and an essay entitled 'Henry James's Ghost Stories' (1921). All these articles originally appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 97-98 for a discussion of Abraham and Torok's theory of 'cryptonymy'.



## Chapter 7

### The Death of the Author: Mortality and the Textual Body

Death is the moment of supreme identity with our bodies. [...] It represents a kind of complete objectivity/phenomenology – the literally unspeakable mystery of matter over mind; object over subject. [...] Death transcends gender divisions and the usual power relations: needless to say, everyone is powerless in its grip (Kemp, 'Feminism, Fiction and Modernism' 109).

Sandra Kemp's analysis in the above quotation suggests that death is a paradoxical phenomenon. The fact that 'everyone is powerless' in the grip of a state that submerges and extinguishes individuality, is ironically balanced by a bestowing of its own liberating power on the subject it destroys: the transcending of social power relations, the mystery of matter over mind, and the triumph of subjectivity over objectivity. The paradoxical nature of death is inherent in the fact that, as Elisabeth Bronfen has argued, the state that most threatens individuality is also its 'supreme confirmation' (*Dead Body* 77). In its transitional status between being and non-being, dying encompasses the most extreme form of the liminal paradox: a capacity to liberate even as it annihilates.

The close symbiosis between liminality and literary Modernism is evident in the latter's preoccupation with death, which is a prevalent theme in the genre. According to Kemp, the death trope recurs in the writing of the women Modernists in particular, for whom death offers what she describes as a 'powerful metaphor to negotiate the space for the writing of another point of view' (100).<sup>1</sup> In the Modernist short story, death is frequently depicted as evoking an all-subsuming threat of annihilation, although there is also an implicit recognition that life is dependent on the non-being which is at the heart of

ourselves and without which we cannot exist. Life is profoundly and irrevocably connected with death and is dependent, to use Foucault's phrase, on that which 'positively threatens to destroy its living force' (*Birth* 155). Whilst in the Modernist short story death is typically depicted as a familiar, intrinsic and 'always already' present condition of life, it is nevertheless also portrayed as embodying the opposing characteristics of an alien, absent 'other': the return of the repressed; a shadowy 'uncanny stranger' residing within the psyche.

Through their depictions of death, the stories I discuss in this chapter reveal a tension between liberation and extinction in both a symbolic and a literal sense. The stories typically depict the 'act' of dying as a transitional process that is both empowering and annihilating. They forge a connection – both explicitly and implicitly – between the literal cadaver and the notion of a textual 'body', the *corpus* of an author's literary leavings after death. This observation relates not only to the inanimate, lifeless body as a symbol of rejection of something from which, according to Julia Kristeva, 'one does not part' (*Powers* 4), it also refers to a body of literary texts following the death of an author. The connection between the body and what Barthes calls the 'body writing' (185) is consistently drawn in the stories of Mansfield, Sinclair, Richardson and Woolf, which in turn suggests an implicit interrelationship between writing and death.

It is therefore significant that Modernist short stories about death are preoccupied with the idea that, as Kemp puts it, 'we are extinguished [and] overwhelmed by our bodies', and that perhaps the 'essence of the obscene [is] that we are nothing but bodies' (109). Kemp's observation is hinted at in the preoccupation with the body in Modernist stories about death, as well the attention they draw to the relationship between death and the literary artefact through the image of the *corpus*.

T S Eliot's assertion that artists cannot be valued alone but must be set for contrast and comparison among the dead poets and artists ('Tradition' 15),

also suggests a relationship of any written text to the tradition of dead poets and artists which precedes it. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf echoes this sentiment. She proclaims that 'masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, [...], so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice' (AROO 59-60). Eliot and Woolf thus stress the interdependency between new artefacts and the established canons of the 'dead poets and artists' preceding them.

In their identification of masterpieces not retaining a complete meaning alone, Woolf and Eliot provide the grounding for later poststructuralist theories which follow a similar line of reasoning. In particular, two essays, Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' and Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author', address similar claims of originality to those raised decades earlier by the Modernist writers. Like Eliot and Woolf, Foucault also questions the insistence that texts are the creation of a single individual.<sup>2</sup> The idea of 'killing' the author is developed in his 1969 lecture 'What is an Author?' in which he questions why, if we consider 'discourse' as a related group of texts and ideas, we are concerned with the idea of the author at all (146).

Barthes's symbolic 'murder' of the author echoes Foucault's challenge to literary criticism which seeks the explanation of a work in the writer who produced it. The 'death' of the author thus becomes his metaphor for a rejection of the concept of originality: 'to give a text an author', he writes, 'is to impose a limit upon it, to *close* the writing' ('Death' 188).

May Sinclair's story 'The Pin-Prick' (1915) is an early literary exploration of the sophisticated theories of the death of the artist which followed in later decades. In the collected volume *Tales Told by Simpson* in which the story was eventually published, the narrator, Roly Simpson, typically presents an artefact from the collection in his ownership, and proceeds to tell a story associated with the artist who produced it.<sup>3</sup> The notion of the text as body thus feasibly relates



in these tales to the body of texts produced throughout an author's lifetime. In 'The Pin-Prick', May Blissett's literal artefacts, the paintings she leaves behind, become her 'corpus'. Typically of theories of intertextuality which would much later proclaim the symbolic 'death of the author', the narrator, Simpson, views the artefact as 'alive' rather than the artist who produced it. The story commences with Simpson's exploration of the artefact around which his tale - the new 'work of art' - centres. 'That's one of poor May Blissett's things' he explains, 'the one she used to say she'd leave me in her will, because, she said, she knew I'd be kind to it. [...]. She spoke of it as if it were a live thing that could be hurt or made happy' (TTBS 237). The fact that May has left the artefact in her will immediately places her as dead and inanimate at the outset of the narrative. It is the art which here takes on human attributes, a 'live thing'. Its creator is metaphorically as well as physically dead owing to the fact that, as the narrator tells 'his' tale, the story becomes Roly Simpson's and not May Blissett's.

The story thus concerns a textual body that becomes preserved, albeit in a distorted, misinterpreted form, literally over the dead body of its creator. In this instance, the 'body' is May Blissett, a lonely woman who commits suicide as a result of a friend's rejection. The 'pin-prick' of the story's title is an apparently trivial event by comparison to the loss and bereavements May has suffered throughout her life. Her suicide note is cryptic, stating nothing of her intentions and is read by Simpson as a 'perfectly sane letter. Not a word about what she meant to do. Evidently she didn't want Frances to connect it with their reception of her' (ibid 247). This again is likely to be a misreading of May's text. The suicide note seems calculated to invoke in its recipients a sense of guilt in its exhortation to '*Forgive me for stopping on like that. [...] But somehow I couldn't help it. And you have forgiven me*' (TTBS 247).

In 'The Pin-Prick', the 'layered' effect of May's texts - her paintings, suicide note, and finally Simpson's 'voice' speaking over hers - emphasises the

divisions between May's existence as a literal, physical body, the residue of life, and her artistic leavings. These distinctions are frequently blurred. There is an implied connection between May and her creations which transgresses the boundary between the human body and the textual, aesthetic body of her work. At the outset of the narrative, Simpson describes May as 'poor', and like the woman herself, the 'poor art' through which she made her living was 'supremely tactful'. It 'spared your pity', Simpson claims, and had no 'embarrassing pretensions' (*TTBS* 243). He mentions twice that May has been 'hung' in the academy; thus again blurring the distinction between the artist and her work. The immortalising of the artefact in being 'hung' also carries macabre connotations of violent death. The story may be seen to demonstrate Mary Douglas's notion of the human body as a symbol whose boundaries 'can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious' (*Purity and Danger* 115). Douglas views the body as a microcosm of society, in which 'the powers and dangers credited to social structure are reproduced in small on the human body' (*ibid*). In recounting his story of May in the form of a miniature portrait of the artist, Simpson attempts to impose these powers on her as his artistic subject.

It is through her act of committing suicide, however, that May resists this attempt and retains control of the peaceful, funereal appearance of her body. Whilst Simpson describes the discovery of her corpse as 'quite decent' (246), it is nonetheless situated in a melodramatic and theatrical setting orchestrated by the dead woman. Her act of self-annihilation ironically turns the artist herself into her own artefact. May is discovered 'lying on the couch which she'd dragged into the middle of the great bare studio, all ready, dressed in her nightgown, with a sheet drawn up to her chin. [...] She had set the candles, one on each side, one at the head, and one at the foot' (246). Yet the scene is characterised by abjection, present in the form of the corpse as a symbol of the

transitional state from subject to object, life to death. Significantly, Kristeva defines the abject as being on the borders of the body, a state of liminality, and claims that the corpse, 'seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life' (*Powers* 4). Simpson himself views the spectacle of the corpse as abject, seeing in it 'nothing stately and ceremonial' (246). The sulphur candles which kill May become a symbol of this abjection in his observation of 'the crimson ooze from it when it burns, as if the thing sweated blood before it began its work' (*TTBS* 246).<sup>4</sup>

The body of May Blissett - her 'text' - thus becomes what David Waterman views as a site of political resistance which attempts to 'subvert and/or appropriate, for an unsanctioned group, some of the cultural power and influences of the ideologically-dominant group' ('Introduction' unpaginated). The theme of horror and suffering, as depicted in Sinclair's story, presents what for Kristeva is 'the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation [...] the violence of poetry, and silence' (*Powers* 141). In 'The Pin-Prick', the suffering which culminates in May's death also allows her, as the dead artist, an ironic subversive potential through the act of her suicide. In this way, May subtly counters Frances's observation that she is 'hardly human', and resists Simpson's attempt to 'paint' her. Although Simpson literally speaks over the dead body of his 'subject/object', still the character of Blissett is able, through her own act of self-annihilation, to convey her own story. In this sense, a representation of the body as text has potentially subversive implications.

Modernist short fiction demonstrates this idea through a continual interrogation of the problems of language and the construction of identity. As in later poststructuralist theories in which the written text is characterised by absence, in the Modernist short story death is frequently employed as a metaphor for writing.<sup>5</sup> The stories discussed here assume the later poststructuralist claim that the written text is characterised by absence.



Moreover, the stories also confront the potentially liberating yet annihilating paradox of the liminal as characteristic of the written text. These stories suggest that writing kills as it sustains, a sentiment echoed in Barthes's later pronouncement that with the act of writing, 'the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death' ('Death' 185).

In 'The Pin-Prick', the fact that Sinclair gives the main protagonist her own first name is ironic in view of Sinclair and Richardson's practical disappearance from the Modernist short-story canon whilst Mansfield and Woolf survived as prominent and established writers.<sup>6</sup> The macabre connection between cadaver and textual body is literally apparent in the circumstances surrounding the death of Katherine Mansfield, after which, as Antony Alpers recounts, John Middleton Murry 'forgot' to pay his wife's funeral bill. In 1929, a New Zealand admirer discovered that her grave had been moved to the *fosse commune*, the pauper's part that is re-used. This information was duly conveyed to Mansfield's father, Sir Harold Beauchamp, who despatched his English son-in-law, Charles Renshaw, to Avon to rectify matters. The corpse was exhumed for a second time and returned to its original burial plot (Alpers 388).

The macabre connection between the circumstances surrounding the exhumation of the literal body and Murry's publication of Mansfield's textual 'body' is raised by Angela Smith, who suggests that this amounts to a 'retention of the mummified body'. Elisabeth Bronfen also suggests in *Over Her Dead Body* that the lifeless form of the female stands secondary in importance to a 'body' of writing which stood to make capital gain for the male publisher. For Smith, the motivation behind Murry's retention of Mansfield's textual *corpus* is an unanswerable question which may be variously interpreted as 'an act of betrayal, of hagiography, of agonised bereavement, or of the triumph of editorial judgement over marital obligation' (67). What does seem likely, however, is that

the fate of Mansfield's unpublished writings after her death had a part to play in securing her status as a canonical Modernist.<sup>7</sup>

The biographical circumstances surrounding the death of Mansfield – her physical and textual body being 'owned' by others – exposes the liminal paradox encompassed by the metaphorical and literal death of the author. Mansfield's situation exposes starkly the fact that her status as a canonical Modernist is marked by powerlessness. The survival of her stories for posterity is achieved at the expense of her privacy, contrary to her own instructions and in violation of her textual and physical *corpus*: literally 'over her dead body'. The fate of Sinclair's textual body is in many ways the opposite of Mansfield's. Sinclair cherished and fiercely guarded her privacy, with the plausible result that her *corpus* of short stories in particular, like the artefacts of her character May Blissett, is virtually obliterated from an already marginalised genre. These situations reveal that both the literal and metaphorical death of an author is marked by the typical double bind of liminality which serves to liberate and annihilate simultaneously.

The depictions of death in Mansfield's stories arguably prefigure the fate of her own textual and physical body in a similar sense to May Sinclair's 'The Pin-Prick'. In 'The Garden Party' (1921), the cadaver is the symbol of a social system that is reinscribed on the body. According to David Waterman, the body itself, in which power and ideology are transcribed, may become a site of resistance, 'a text which can be read and interpreted' (*Disordered Bodies* unpaginated). This occurs in 'The Garden Party' with Laura's first physical confrontation with the reality of death, which entails a significant rite of passage in her life. Through her encounter with a dead carter, Laura experiences a brief respite from the conventions of her mother's class prejudices, a situation that is only made possible by the death of another human being. The encounter results in a form of epiphany which reveals to Laura that finding her own voice is

not necessarily an easy thing to achieve, if this is possible at all, and that rites of passage can sometimes be painful.

Unlike the remainder of her family, Laura sees class distinctions as absurd and despises 'stupid conventions' (ibid 248). Her reaction to the news of the death occurring just outside their home also differs markedly from that of her family, who respond in terms of established class distinctions and perceived inconvenience. Laura wants to cancel the garden party planned for that day, whereas her mother tells her that 'it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment' (255-6). Her father's mention of the death after the party has concluded is considered by his family to be 'very tactless' (258). As Lorna Sage observes, death is regarded here as merely 'a terrible and tasteless event that cannot be allowed to intrude on the living but does all the time and everywhere' ('Introduction', *The Garden Party* xviii).

Laura's status as a liminal, transitional figure on the cusp between childhood and adolescence is reflected in her uncertain use of language as she tries to negotiate her place in her surroundings. When meeting the workmen who arrive to erect the marquee, Laura is embarrassed suddenly to recall that she is still holding a piece of bread and butter from the breakfast table: "'Good morning", she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, "Oh – er – have you come – is it about the marquee?"' (CS 246).

At a later stage, Laura's breathless and childish: 'Oh, I do love parties, don't you?' (ibid 248), spoken to her brother, is a direct contrast to the telephone conversation in which, again, she obviously mimics her mother's discourse: "'Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted, of course. [...]. Yes, isn't it a perfect morning? Your white? Oh, I certainly should'" (ibid). Whilst negotiating the cusp between childhood and adolescence, the sudden intrusion of death into



Laura's world is disconcerting as it undermines the ordered, rigidly structured world she strives to maintain. As Mansfield explains this in a private letter:

Laura feels things ought to happen differently. First one and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it. Laura says 'But all these things must not happen at once'. And life answers, 'Why not? How are they divided from each other?' And they do all happen, it is inevitable (*CLKM* 2 196).

The class conventions of her family are temporarily suspended when Laura delivers the basket to the carter's widow and finds herself unable to refuse the required convention of paying her respects to the dead. Her encounter with Scott's body affects her profoundly. She sees the dead man as 'peaceful' and 'remote', 'wonderful and beautiful' (CS 261). The body, a physical symbol of the transition from living, speaking subject to inanimate object, is symptomatic of Laura's own liminal status. Her reaction is ambivalent, in that whilst her encounter with the dead man is happy – 'All is well, said that sleeping face' – still Laura 'had to cry' (CS 261).

Laura's reaction reflects Zygmunt Bauman's definition of ambivalence as 'a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform' (1). Like the corpse and the written text, language is positioned between the solid, orderly world 'fit for human habitation', and what Bauman calls 'a contingent world of randomness'. Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress this randomness and contingency (*ibid*).<sup>8</sup> Significantly, after encountering the corpse, a palpable image of liminality, Laura is unable to find the words to explain her experience to her brother afterwards:

'It was simply marvellous. But Laurie –' she stopped, she looked at her brother, 'Isn't life', she stammered, 'isn't life –'. But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

'Isn't it, darling', said Laurie (261).

In 'The Garden Party', Laura's anxiety in the face of her ambivalent encounter with liminality and death is experienced as a form of disorder; an encounter with an unnameable and potentially threatening other. Her broken and disjointed language is indicative of this condition. Situations that fall outside the naming and classifying function performed by language are experienced as a threat. The ambivalence frequently experienced in the space between states thus relates to what Bauman calls 'the *alter ego* of language, [...] its permanent companion - indeed, its normal condition' (1).

Laura's struggle to communicate her encounter with death results in the characteristic breakdown of syntax marking the 'epiphanic' revelation in Mansfield's stories, as discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, as established in Chapter 4, language itself is a liminal entity standing between the two worlds of order and chaos. In its turn the written text, like the corpse, embodies the liberating and restrictive double-bind of liminality, signifying presence and memory even as it usurps them.

Both the body and the 'body writing' may thus be viewed as a memoriam; a liminal image standing between life and death. As Kathleen Woodward suggests, the memoriam or text has a major cultural significance. The literary text serves as a memorial 'to keep alive a memory, to sustain it, to preserve it' ('Creativity' 96). A memorial, such as a headstone, is dependent on text, on language, to keep it 'alive' (ibid).<sup>9</sup>

The act of preserving memory as a written text suggests that death is an inherent characteristic of the literary text. Virginia Woolf's 'Sympathy' tackles this

notion, focusing on a narrator's response to a death notice in a newspaper she mistakenly relates to an acquaintance: 'It must be Celia's husband. Dead! Good Heavens! Humphry Hammond dead! I meant to ask them – I forgot. Why didn't I go the day they wanted me to come?' (*HH* 102). After viewing the announcement, the thoughts of the speaker are permeated by death. A voice intrudes into the text which the narrator imagines is Celia's, and which merges with her own: "'Humphry is managing the business" Humphry – who is dead? – "we shall, I suppose, move into the big house". The house of death?' (*ibid*).

In 'Sympathy', the image of the newspaper in which the narrator reads the announcement is liminal, denoting a boundary between external events and the speculations of the narrator, which are later proven to be false. Likewise, Woolf's story 'A Mark on the Wall' is based around the falsity of newspaper reports of war, and in 'An Unwritten Novel', the narrator contemplates her travelling companion over the edge of *The Times*, which connects the two women as it 'knows' their suffering. In each of the stories, as Michelle Levy has noted, the speculations triggered by the newspapers are proven false: 'the mark on the wall is a snail; Humphry Hammond the elder is the deceased; and the woman on the train is a wife and mother' (143). On reaching the realisation that her entire story is a 'misreading', the 'Unwritten Novel' narrator exclaims 'Life's bare as a bone' (*HH* 115). Similarly, on realising she is mistaken and that the dead man is in fact Celia's father-in-law, the 'Sympathy' narrator's reaction is ironically one of disappointment: 'O don't tell me he lives still! O why did you deceive me?' (*HH* 105).

The story of 'Sympathy' is thus constructed around the narrator's misinterpretation of a text proclaiming death. The object of her contemplation thus becomes a 'double' of the elder Humphry Hammond referred to in the *Times* announcement as having died 'on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, at the Manor, High Wickham, Bucks' (*HH* 102). The announcement provides a dual function, a short



piece of text commemorating the dead acts as a catalyst for the narrator's misplaced survivor's guilt and mourning, prompting a story about an unrelated protagonist whilst the dead character is marginalised. Yet as the text acknowledges, death resides within life, and within one human subject is concealed 'the immense power of death'. By ceasing to exist, the dead man 'had removed the boundaries and fused the separate entities [...] and though his voice was nothing his silence is profound' (ibid 104). The story thus uses death as a prevalent metaphor for writing. This is significant as Bronfen suggests: paraphrasing Foucault's argument with regard to the act of writing about death,

Given that writing always involves absence and reduplication, the transformation Foucault locates in cultural practice at the end of the eighteenth century must be seen as a conscious implementation of the affinity between death, indefinite repetition or striving and the endless self-repetition and reduplication of language (Bronfen 76).

The transitional process of mourning is recognised by the narrator of 'Sympathy', who speaks of Celia's new status as a recent 'widow' as liminal. 'Moving amongst us with her secret unconfessed' this narrator states, 'I shall fancy her eager for the night to come with its lonely voyage [...] In the midst of clamour I shall think that she hears more; the emptiness has for her its ghost' (HH 102). Significantly, the narrator envies Celia 'the security - the knowledge' (ibid), although as Victor Turner points out, liminal phenomena such as mourning rituals may be viewed as the 'acme of insecurity' rather than the source of creative potential.<sup>10</sup> This is evidenced in the speculation of the 'Sympathy' narrator on the figure of the imagined corpse of Hammond:

Now the pink cheeks are pale and the eyes with the young man's look of resolution and defiance closed, defiant still beneath their lids. Male and unyielding stiff he lies upon his bed, so that I see it white and steep; the windows open, the birds singing, no concession to death; no tears no sentiment (*HH* 102).

The image of the corpse is an ultimate metaphor of liminality on the borders of our condition as human beings. As Julia Kristeva puts it, the corpse (cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), 'is cesspool, and death [...] at the border of my condition as a human being' (*Powers* 3). As Bronfen has noted, for the living who relate to the corpse 'witnessing death affirms a sense of personal individuality in the survivors, while society resorts to rituals that imply the refusal to accept mortality' (*Dead Body* 77). Confrontations with death are therefore only possible through witnessing 'the death of the other' (*ibid* x). This scenario occurs in Mansfield's story 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', which centres on the scene of death as a subversion of the romanticised ideal of the 'deathbed scene'. The story contains a graphic depiction of the moment of the colonel's death:

He lay there, purple, a dark, angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in. Then, as they were standing there, wondering what to do, he had suddenly opened one eye. Oh, what a difference it would have made, what a difference to their memory of him, how much easier to tell people about it, if he had only opened both! But no – one eye only. It glared at them a moment and then ... went out (*CS* 266-7).

The detailed attention to the image of the corpse in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' and 'Sympathy' subverts the idealised notion of the 'Good Death' as

well as the ritual conventions surrounding the process of death itself.<sup>11</sup> According to Bronfen, the corpse is a body-double, viewed in relation to the absence of something more meaningful which is 'always already lost' (*Over Her Dead Body* 84). As the ultimate image of liminality, the transition between the worlds of the dead and the living, the corpse and the images of ritual surrounding it open up the potential of resistance offered by the liminal trope and enable an evaluation of this through the processes of mourning. Such reactions do not merely constitute negative responses, however. In 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', two sisters feel a guilty pleasure after their father's death which releases them from his tyranny and their domestic servitude. This is a subversion of the mourning process, which usually acknowledges grief, and thus points to the dual nature of liminality as the condition of mourning. According to Arnold van Gennep, mourners enter a transitional period through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society. Moreover, the transitional period of the living is sometimes a counterpart to that of the dead. As Van Gennep explains it, 'the termination of the first sometimes coincides with the termination of the second – that is, with the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead' (146-7).

This process is re-enacted in Mansfield's story of the sisters' concern with maintaining propriety and social expectations in the face of death. The story centres on conventions surrounding death and mourning as a process as opposed to a story of grief; and is devoid of sentimentality. Constantia suggests their dressing-gowns should be dyed black, concerned that it might be insincere to wear black out of doors but not at home. Although Josephine counters 'nobody sees us' (CS 263), Constantia is worried about the servant and postman seeing them. Both sisters are reluctant, envisioning 'two black dressing-gowns and two black pairs of woolly slippers, creeping off to the bathroom like black cats' (CS 263), and ultimately they conclude they don't think



it 'absolutely necessary' (CS 263). In a similar sense, Josephine's attention to notices, letters and formalities, has an air of performance about it, a simple reiteration and re-enacting of long established cultural tradition. In replying to her letters of condolence, and in breaking down each time she comes to the phrase 'we miss our dear father so much' Josephine reflects that 'She couldn't have put it on – but twenty-three times. Even now, though, when she said over to herself sadly "we miss our dear father so much", she could have cried if she'd wanted to' (CS 263).

The instances of the dressing gowns and the letters are revealing, as they suggest a process of carefully observed social rituals relating to death. The phrase 'she could have cried if she'd wanted to' suggests a response to the expected rituals of mourning and the occupying of a space *between* mourning and melancholia, rather than a manifestation of grief, thus subverting Freud's casting of the difference between mourning and melancholia as a clear-cut binary opposition. For Kathleen Woodward, this is a 'false opposition' which has paralysed discussions about mourning ever since ('Creativity', 83-85). 'Daughters of the Late Colonel' focuses on a transient state of mourning where the usual codes and practices of society are suspended. This throws the two conservative sisters into turmoil. They panic when confronted with a threatening liminal state, which is also their rite of passage to liberation, and react indecisively. They cannot bring themselves to sort through their father's possessions or decide whether to keep the servant on. When the priest offers them a Communion by way of consolation it terrifies them:

What! In the drawing room by themselves – with no – no altar or anything! The piano would be much too high, thought Constantia, and Mr Farolles could not possibly lean over it with the chalice. [...] And supposing the bell rang in the middle? It might be somebody important –

about their mourning. Would they get up reverently and go out or would they have to wait, in torture? (CS 267-8).

The notion of waiting in torture places the two characters in a liminal position of mourning. This results in a continual state of mourning that is not 'resolved', as in Freud's analysis, by the incorporation of the lost object into the ego. Woodward ultimately charges Freud with not addressing the possibility of a creative outcome of loss in 'Mourning and Melancholia', although both Barthes and Freud in their later writings challenged the canonical assumption that successful mourning is signalled by the end of grief (ibid 95). The possibility of creative mourning does, however, exist in Mansfield's story, and is suggested by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. Woodward suggests that between mourning and melancholia is a 'wound'. For Barthes, this wound is kept 'open' by a photograph of his mother, which he uses as a means of refusing to allow the wound of his mother's death to heal ('Creativity' 93).

The photograph thus becomes a further example of a memorial text which replaces and subverts memory and the immediacy of physical presence. The liminal image of the photograph features in 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', when Josephine sees a ray of sunlight catching a photograph of their dead mother and, at the sight of it, wonders why the photographs of dead people fade so. She concludes that 'as soon as a person was dead their photograph died too' (CS 282-3). Whilst Barthes concentrates the production of his pain into the photograph, for Josephine the photograph represents her release from her domestic servitude to her father, and the present meets the past in her grief for the loss of the self she might have possessed had her mother lived. The photograph thus bridges the divide between life and death, presence and absence, and is characterised by a simultaneous capacity for liberation and restriction. It becomes a physical symbol of the ambivalence experienced by

Constantia and Josephine in their state of mourning, which ultimately leads them to the realisation of their freedom from familial and domestic responsibility. The story does not indicate what the sisters intend to do with this newly discovered freedom, if anything at all. It is their status as liminers which is of concern.

The photograph, an object on which mourning is focused in 'Daughters of the Late Colonel' and *Camera Lucida*, thus becomes a motif of the liminal status *between* mourning and melancholia. In retaining psychic pain, the subject occupies a state halfway between anxiety and attachment to others, which is also the condition of the state psychoanalysis has variously defined as the 'pre-oedipal phase', the 'depressive position', and the 'intermediate area'. All these states relate to the 'loss' of the mother's body to the infant, a process which recurs throughout life whenever loss and mourning are experienced. Gabriele Schwab goes further, suggesting that a connection exists not only between D W Winnicott's theory of the intermediate area and the event of mourning, but also the process of death. In much the same way as a child makes the entry into language, death becomes a reversal of that process; a transition *out* of the world of social order and language into a mode of silence and non-being.

The stage of infant development identified by psychoanalysis as the pre-oedipal, imaginary or semiotic, denotes a state of dependency on the mother's body before a child makes the transition into the ordered world of language and social structures. In 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951), Winnicott introduces 'transitionality', a significant liminal phenomenon, as a subject for psychoanalytical studies. In a mode characteristic of liminality, a hypothetical area 'exists (yet cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother or part of mother) during the phase of repudiating the object as not-me, that is to say, at the end of being merged with the object ' (Izhaki, 'Play and Reality' 49).<sup>12</sup>



In the transitional space of this hypothetical area, Schwab identifies a paradoxical liminal state between 'a voice trying to grasp a mode of being beyond categories that separate living and dying, I and Not-I, self and other' (Schwab 206). Dorothy Richardson's story 'Ordeal' (1930) exposes the balance proffered by a similar liminal state separating life from death, self from other, and is suggestive of the need to live with non-being without, as Terry Eagleton puts it, 'being in love with it' (*After Theory* 213). 'Ordeal' suggests the process of a death drive at work in which, as Freud puts it, 'the pleasure principle seems [...] actually to serve the death instincts' ('Pleasure Principle' 63). The story focuses on the insights, thoughts and perceptions of a woman who is entering a nursing home for a serious operation. Amid her uncertainty regarding her own survival the protagonist, Fan, is surprised by the discovery of a new sense of self-awareness which is attainable only through the immediacy of the real possibility of her death.

She had thought in advance that her sense of personal life must cease when she entered the door of the nursing home. But instead it was intensified, as if, bought up against a barrier from behind which no certain future poured into it, her life flowed back upon itself, embarrassing her with its livid palpitation. Her known self, arrested thus, was making all its statements at once (*JP* 69-70).

The image of the nursing home as a 'barrier' is striking as it suggests an in-between state through which Fan negotiates a possible transition from life into death, but against which life protests. It is this transitional state which receives full consideration in the story. The concern here is not with Fan's ultimate fate, which remains unknown, but her rite of passage, her inner self, and her thoughts as she negotiates it. At one stage Fan reflects 'This, then, was farewell to

humanity on this side of the barrier' (*JP* 71). The barrier is a potent symbol of liminality relating to the precarious divide between life and death on which the story focuses. The nursing home, typically of such liminal sites, is both threatening and comforting, a transitional place that may release her either into death or a new life of renewed health. It is only when confronted by this paradox that Fan is able to regain 'the freedom of her own identity'. She reflects that death may take on a form of duality for those engaged in the act of dying. Her possible impending death has the potential to reveal the double-bind of experience as the end of an 'exciting, absorbing' struggle of life which prevents the communication of thoughts, tempered by a 'sense of being in its perfect fullness ...' (*JP* 73-74).

Fan reflects that the intensity of experience 'made the possible future look like a shallow expanse, something very easy to sacrifice if she considered only herself' (*JP* 70). It is thus only the possibility of death that affords Fan a brief respite from her domestic life. Only now is a rapprochement between the social functions she has performed as a woman throughout her life, and her individual sense of self, possible. It is a period of reflection and intense self-identification. Fan responds to the threat to her existence, not in a negative acceptance of the inevitable but by feeling a positive, 'deep, good cheer, that made her smile as she hung up her clothes in the wardrobe, perhaps for the last time' (*JP* 70). Fan's sense of liberation is highly ironic in the context of her possible death as a potentially new sense of being. In this story, Richardson focuses more on the notion of death as a positive release than a destructive entity that simply annihilates. Moreover, Fan's response to her own impending death echoes Pontalis's contention that death liberates, as it

ceases to have a direct grip on the body. It is internalised. It spreads out, it multiplies itself. In changing area it changes meanings. It is no

longer met as an external menace that one could only try vainly to protect oneself against (Pontalis 89).

Such a process is experienced by Fan who describes the onset of possible death as being a 'blissful' state in which 'she felt all the tensions of her life relax'. She experiences relief at being severed even from her husband, and relishes the freedom of her own identity and pre-marriage self, which ironically, only death has the power to give her. For Fan the afternoon leading up to her operation 'lay before her, endless – *the first holiday of her adult life*' (JP 73). The description of death as a holiday is illuminating in the context of Fan's feelings of relief in her severance from her husband. For a time, she is able to relish the interlude as she waits to either die or live. Within this transitional phase, Fan feels contentment at 'the gift of the holiday from responsibility and from the tension of human relationships', which only the chance of death has the power to give her (ibid).

The holiday and a potential transition into annihilation thus become the positive and negative aspects of a state of liminality away from the ordinariness of daily existence. Richardson's stories 'Journey to Paradise' and 'Tryst' also relate to the idea of the holiday as a transient, liminal status. In both cases, the holiday becomes a metaphor for the liminal and combines a sense of freedom with the possibly final liminal state of death which Fan faces in 'Ordeal'. Pontalis offers a possible explanation of how women's subjectivities are bound up in their social roles and tied to their bodies, and how death provides the potential for escape, offering a possible explanation for the holiday as a metaphor for death in Richardson's story.

'Ordeal' echoes the notion that death is inseparable from life, a condition or aspect of being that is both alien and familiar or, as Eagleton puts it, 'neither wholly strange nor purely one's own' (*After Theory* 211). The double aspect of



death as both alien and intimate is significant here, revealing the dual nature and some of the liberating potential which death has to offer. As Fan waits in her room, she senses 'something that had been waiting within the quietude of the room for its moment' (*JP* 71-72). This dual state continues in an instance when Fan puts down her book and questions, 'as if it were a person with her in the room, the fact that she had forgotten, in the intensity of her absorption in *Green Mansions*, what lay ahead' (*JP* 74). Significantly, the division of the self from the body is represented through the image of the book; a written artefact standing between the two states of presence and absence.

The act of reading shortly before Fan's possibly impending death transports her into another dimension in which she identifies other selves; what Schwab describes as "phantasms of the fragmented body", the ambiguous "other" of our notion of the unity of a self' (Schwab 208). Here, death is depicted as an ambiguous 'other' or alien concept. Apparently contradicting this view, however, is a recognition that death is integral to subjectivity and exists in a mutually dependent relationship to life. Death is always already there; a shadowy sub-aspect of identity and a condition at the heart of being. As Terry Eagleton phrases it, 'as long as you are alive, you will never be able to extinguish the non-being at the heart of yourself' (*After Theory* 218).

It is this notion of the tensions between life and not life, 'I' and 'not-I', and the transition from speaking subject to inanimate object which Richardson's story plays with. As Fan's anaesthetic is administered at the end of the narrative, she sees trees beyond the window 'as she lay, belonging, completing' (*JP* 76). As Fan's 'threatened heart' begins a desperate fight against the power of death which threatens to overwhelm her, it is significant that 'her heart answered, her blood answered; but not herself' (*JP* 76).

Fan's experience in 'Ordeal' substantiates Schwab's suggestion that the principle of an intermediate area between speech and silence may also be

applied in the sense in which, in illness or old age, death becomes a process for weaning oneself out of, rather than into, 'reality'. As Schwab puts it, 'we have to prepare [...] for the transition out of reality and to cope with the anxieties of an ultimate separation from the world. Thus it seems natural that reactivating the modes of being of the intermediate area might help with the transition from life to death, easing our way *out* of reality as they once eased our way *into* reality' (Schwab 207).

This is the process Fan undergoes in her insistence on being separated from her husband before confronting death, and in her relief at the 'blessing' that the female companion who does accompany her, 'was not coming upstairs' (*JP* 68). Kathleen Woodward substantiates Schwab's theory in a suggestion that a pattern of loss is reinscribed throughout life in a duplication of this process, and in the eventual disassociation of the subject from 'reality' during the process of ageing and bodily death (Woodward 83). In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), Freud also identifies the presence of a deadly and all-subsuming death drive as an acknowledgement that death is a condition on which all life depends. It is this instinct, argues Eagleton, which 'cajoles us into tearing ourselves apart in order to achieve the absolute security of nothingness' (*After Theory* 213). Thus our very subjective existence involves a condition of primary masochism which the ego unleashes on itself. This view, Freud argues, compels us to say '*the aim of all life is death*' ('Pleasure Principle' 38).

In Katherine Mansfield's story 'Prelude', Linda Burnell's fantasy in the garden may be interpreted as a manifestation of the death drive and one which initiates from her wish to separate herself from both her husband and her maternal duties. Her experience in the garden at night which triggers the fantasy of the aloe is both alien and familiar, which may be related to Freud's notion of *das Heimlich* and its extension into its 'opposite' *das Unheimlich*. In Linda's ambivalent suspension between these two states, the binary opposition is

deconstructed or, as Kristeva puts it, becomes neither new nor alien. It is something which is 'familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (*Strangers* 184). As Linda looks at the aloe, it becomes in her imagination a ship with its oars lifted; the grassy bank on which it rests rising up 'like a wave' to meet it. This vision of the aloe turning into a ship enables Linda to contemplate her own disappearance from her life:

She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks, and the dark bush beyond. [...]

How much more real was this dream than that they should go back into the house where the sleeping children lay (CS 53).

In a fantasy both annihilating and transcending the self, Linda literally disappears from her wifely duties. Indeed, this experience is intimately related to maternity, a fact Linda refers to explicitly when she questions 'How absurd life was [...] And why this mania of hers to keep alive at all? For it really was a mania [...] What am I guarding myself for so precious? I shall go on having children ...' (CS 54). This condition is reflected in the death drive, a repetition of the intermediate area or depressive position, at various stages throughout life. As Freud points out, the idea of the 'double' does not disappear after the passing of primary narcissism, but 'can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego's development' ('The Uncanny' 357). In Freud's essays 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and 'The Uncanny', the frightening or unfamiliar is terrifying precisely because it is intrinsic to the self, as a shadowy other or



dual inhabitant: an alien yet unfamiliar entity that is always already residing within the psyche.

A recognition of this 'other' within the self occurs in 'Prelude' not only with Linda but also her daughter, Kezia, whose actions mirror her mother's on several occasions. Kezia experiences a possible manifestation of the death drive in the empty home she has lived in and is about to leave. Her fear surfaces when she re-enters the empty family house and darkness falls, and is symptomatic of Freud's theories of the uncanny and a confrontation with the 'eerily familiar'. Empty of furniture, the house takes on a threatening and alien feel with the onset of darkness. As Kezia stands by the window in the empty house:

the day flickered out and dark came. With the dark crept the wind snuffling and howling. The windows of the empty house shook, a creaking came from the walls and floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. Kezia was suddenly quite, quite still, with wide open eyes and knees pressed together. She was frightened. She wanted to call Lottie and to go on calling all the while she ran downstairs and out of the house. But IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back door (CS 15).

The reference to the unnameable 'it' which threatens the safe order of the childish world is significant here. The aggressor remains shadowy and elusive. 'The unnameable, unnamed 'It' is the same entity that pursues the child out of the flower bed in Richardson's 'The Garden'. The darkness that defamiliarises safe and formerly habitable spaces, takes on an alien quality which distorts the proportions of a room in the child's perception, turning a once safe space into an

uninhabitable, ominous and threatening one. The 'it', is never specified, but is an entity that lies between safe, familiar spaces and the world of the unknown. There is a strikingly similar scene in Richardson's 'The Garden'. Here the garden is presented as a space in which the child-persona feels safe, although she fears the unknown entity beyond which is again described as an elusive, mysterious 'It' glimpsed in the strange yet familiar realm of the liminal.

far away down the path where it was different It could come. It could not get here. [...] It was always in other parts of the garden. Between the rows of peas. Always sounding in the empty part at the end.

Outside the garden it was dark and cold (*JP* 23).

The linguistic slippage between the various meanings of the word 'it' in this passage is a noteworthy aspect of the intrusion of the liminal on which the story focuses. 'It' relates to various different aspects, namely to an unnameable, elusive and also a shifting presence which poses a source of fear to the child. The unnameable presence, the 'it' lurking beyond the periphery of the child's vision: 'was always in other parts of the garden', an ominous and frightening presence.

This potentially relates to Eagleton's notion of death as the non-being at the centre of ourselves, and his contention that 'I can know who I am or what I am feeling only by belonging to a language which is never my personal possession' (*After Theory* 212). The liminal attributes of this entity are further emphasised in this slippage between the lurking presence of the 'it'; something which is always liminal, beyond, out of reach, and the notion of 'it' as the inevitable aspects of life itself: 'outside the garden it was dark and cold'. In its slippage between a terrifying attribute of an alien other, something 'outside' the child's subjective experience, and the everyday attributes of familiar life, the 'it' is

defined as a liminal, terrifying presence always on the cusp of two states. 'It' is death, but also life; a consistent playing between absence and presence which marks the scene as liminal. This intensifies the impression of death as an intrinsic part of the human psyche.

This play between absence and presence is a dilemma confronted in Dorothy Richardson's 1924 story, 'Death', originally published in the *Weekly Westminster*. The story immerses the reader in the consciousness of a single character who is engaged in the act of dying. Faced with imminent death, she reflects that 'no one knows what it is, how awful beyond everything till they're in for it. Nobody knows death in this rush of life in all your parts' (*JP* 104). The reference to the secret life potentially relates to the death residing within. Without death there can be no life as they are inexorably intertwined. Although death as a rush of life appears oxymoronic, given that death denotes annihilation, the deconstruction of these polarities enables death to be viewed as a condition of life, existing with it in a state of interdependency.

The protagonist recognises that death offers the potential for power as it ultimately transcends class, gender and social divisions: 'They're all in for it, rich and poor alike. No help' (*JP* 105). This acknowledges Sandra Kemp's point that the imaginative release offered by the death trope is characterised by the fact that it renders everyone equally powerless. It results in a suspension of social conventions and dissolves class and gender inequalities. This is discernible in 'Death', in which memories of a life of hard work as well as her discourse illustrate the speaker's class and also her feminine roles. She berates her own folly at thinking her husband was any different, and that when he died 'she'd thought him the same as at first, and cried because she'd let it all slip in the worries. Little Joe. Tearing her open, then snuggled in her arms, suckling' (*JP* 106). It is as if all her roles, motherhood, widowhood, work, have consumed



her in this final brief soliloquy preceding her death: 'death must be got through as life had been, just somehow' (*JP* 107).

It is unclear whether this is the language of reverie or external speech. The boundaries are not defined by punctuation, which adds to the elusiveness of a text flitting between third and first-person narrative and between internal and external worlds. The final shift into the third-person takes place just before the physical process of death, which is experienced as multiple and spatial, denoting the entire life cycle of the protagonist in the moments beforehand and depicting the point of death as a backward rather than forward movement:

Back and back she slid, down a long tunnel at terrific speed, cool, her brow cool and wet, with wind blowing upon it. Darkness in front. Back and back into her own young body, alone. In front of the darkness came the garden, the old garden in April, the crab-apple blossom, all as it was before she began, but brighter ... (*JP* 107).

In her regression into the childhood space of the garden and the body of her younger self, the protagonist experiences a disruption of linear order and the turning inward of the self. In theories of the death drive, this has the effect of a 'purely external causality and constraint' posited against internal angst, which Jacqueline Rose argues is 'the product of a theory that, like the psyche it describes, is turned in on itself' (Rose 89-90).

The shift to the third-person narrator as death takes place is significant, denoting the impossibility of death as a subjective experience. Although the text appears immersed in the conscious processes of a dying protagonist, the nature of the written text is already at work usurping the speaker. Writing is thus by its very nature a signifier of simultaneous presence and absence. Attention is drawn to this in Richardson's story with the continual repetition of the word 'slip',

denoting a slippage of time and meaning throughout the text. The literary artefact itself thus embodies the conditions of ambivalence inherent within it; death is not distinct from life but the two are interdependent.

The story of 'Death' shows literally how writing – a usurper of immediate presence - embodies the properties of absence as an intrinsic characteristic. If writing is a preservation of life, it is also death. May Sinclair anticipates this theoretical event in an ironic commentary on the process of canonising in a short story entitled 'The Wrackham Memoirs' (1913). Another tale told by Simpson, this story focuses on competitive journalists writing about social rituals, and a trite author whose greatest fear is oblivion and not becoming, as he mistakenly believes he should be, immortalised by his writing. The outset of the story takes place at the funeral of Wrackham's rival, Ford Lankester, a writer whose talents are superior to Wrackham's own and whose demise immediately puts him in a position of power over the living writer. Wrackham attends Lankester's funeral in order to be seen by the literary hacks to be associated with Lankester, and to ensure his appearance in their articles on the funeral which inevitably follow. Wrackham's own explanation for his presence is condescending, claiming that for all his rival's greatness '*this was the last of him*' (TTBS 266), and he will probably never mean much to the next generation. Wrackham's efforts to capitalise on his rival's death and displace him in the literary canon centre on the fact that 'he alienated the many. And, say what you like, the judgement of posterity is not the judgement of the few' (ibid).

Wrackham's response addresses some of the concerns which have preoccupied twentieth-century literary criticism: a concern with mortality, the canonising process and, as Sinclair's biographer Suzanne Raitt has noted, an anxiety of influence and an awareness of the 'fragility of poetic reputation' (Raitt 193). As well as Wrackham's agony over his own mortality the story confronts a similar dilemma from the view point of the journalist, Burton, who risks his

literary reputation when presented with a stark choice between 'immortalising' the life of one of two writers. He may edit the 'life' of Wrackham, a trite writer whose books even his daughter describes as 'pot boilers'; or the young, talented and critically acclaimed Lankester who has recently died. The same critic, it is implied, cannot write both 'lives': Wrackham was 'not read, or recognised by the people who admired Ford Lankester' (*TTBS* 275).

The story centres not only on Burton's concern for his own literary reputation, but also Wrackham's fear that his fate in literary history will be oblivion. He rails against the journalists who persist in ridiculing him in the press, lamenting the cost of building up a Great Name and the apparent determination of the literary hacks to destroy his. The narrator, Simpson, attempts to console Wrackham by pointing out there is little they can do; 'When a man has once captured and charmed the Great Heart of the Public, he's safe – in his lifetime, anyway' (*TTBS* 277).

Wrackham, however, is not concerned with this: 'Do you suppose he cares about his lifetime? It's the life beyond life – the life beyond life' (*ibid*). The implication that writing carries within itself the potential to 'kill' the author is not comprehended by Wrackham, but the narrator, Simpson, recognises this. The connection between writing and death is again made explicit in Sinclair's story. The belief entertained by Wrackham that writing 'immortalises' is, as both Barthes and Foucault suggest, deeply ingrained in cultural and ideological assumptions of writing as a means of resisting or defying death. The Greek epic is one example of this tradition in literature, in which the hero is willing to die young as his heroic feats have guaranteed his immortality. Likewise, the Arabian narrative *A Thousand and One Nights* involves the narrator, Scheherazade, telling stories 'into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator' ('What is an Author' 141).



The central tenet of intertextual theory is, however, a reversal of this equation. Rather than a means of staving off death or achieving immortality, Barthes and Foucault suggest that writing 'kills' the author. In other words, the author's metaphorical death deconstructs the concept of the author-God as a transcendental signified. As Barthes puts it, 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' ('Death' 188). Barthes's pronouncement carries echoes of Nietzsche's declaration that 'God is dead', a statement meaning the author is no longer at the centre of the text or origin of meaning.

It is thus ironic that Wrackham believes literary success is measured by immortality, by 'the permanence of the impression you had made' (*TTBS* 276), and Burton is horrified when he is informed by Wrackham's widow and Antigone, Wrackham's daughter to whom Burton is engaged, that he and the narrator, Simpson, have been named as Wrackham's literary executors. Antigone knows her father's work is trite but insists upon Burton's fulfilling her father's dying wish of writing his 'Life' if she is to marry him: 'he had expressed a wish, a wish that they felt they could not disregard' (*TTBS* 280). In view of this, as Simpson observes, Wrackham was 'happy in his death. It saved him from the thing he dreaded above everything, certainty of the ultimate extinction' (*TTBS* 277). In order to avoid this, and in another move to usurp Lankester, he ensures Burton is compelled to carry out the work on his own memoirs instead. Burton is already editing the *Life and Letters of Ford Lankester* with a Critical Introduction, a fact which had appeared in the papers a few days before Wrackham's death. Wrackham, however, had 'had his eye' on Burton as a potential editor of his memoirs, believing that this will add to his own posthumous reputation: '*There was prestige, there was the thing he wanted*' (*TTBS* 281).

The familiar contradiction of the deathly liminal-double bind is apparent here. Death annihilates, but in doing so it enables the author to live. However, within this story both Simpson and Burton literally speak over the dead body of its subject. Antigone tells Burton that her father's literary leavings contain an essence of him; 'what lay behind everything he had written [...] a vast hinterland of intention, the unexplored and unexploited spirit of him' (*TTBS* 283). On encountering the trite contents of the memoirs, however, Burton sees that 'there wasn't any hinterland. He's opened himself up. You can see all there was of him' (*TTBS* 287).

Ironically, in compiling Wrackham's memoirs, Burton edits him out of existence. He understands that the task required of him is to 'wrap him up [...] so that nobody can see. *That's* what I'm here for – to edit him [...] out of all recognition' (*TTBS* 288). Thus Wrackham's actions in choosing his executors and ensuring his literary 'immortality' ironically bring about the thing he most feared. His place in the literary canon is overwritten, and then finally obliterated completely when Simpson manages to convince Antigone that the memoirs are more harmful to her father's reputation than otherwise and persuades her to burn them.

The part played by the four writer-protagonists in Sinclair's story, one who is dead before the text begins and another who dies during the course of the narrative, raises the question of the relationship between author and critic in the canonising process. The journalist, Grevill Burton, faces the dilemma of jeopardising his own credibility as a writer, as well as that of the talented young author whose memoirs he is engaged in writing, if he writes what Suzanne Raitt describes as 'a suitably hagiographic biography of the mediocre older poet' (Raitt 193). The term 'hagiography', of writing the life of a 'saint' or in literary terms, a canonised textual body, is significant when taking into account the prevalence of 'the death of the author' as a Modernist metaphor for writing. This

theme is discernible in 'The Wrackham Memoirs' as both a literal and metaphorical event. As Allen points out, Barthes' later account of the text disturbs the traditional model of the author-critic relationship, turning both into readers (Allen 75). In turn, reading becomes a process of movement between texts. Language itself is thus substituted for the author who has traditionally assumed authority over it.

As a substitute for physical presence, the written text thus embodies death. It becomes a 'memorial' to memory, and embodies not only the liminal qualities of language as a 'bridge' between two worlds but also as a boundary between the living and the dead.<sup>13</sup> The potential for articulating a literary 'voice' and surviving within the canon is necessarily posited against death's shadowy 'other': silence, marginalisation and oblivion. The ambivalence that characterises such a paradoxical state is also typical of Modernism, which according to Zygmunt Bauman evokes a simultaneous nostalgia for and rejection of the past. These dilemmas equated in the early twentieth century to a new, 'Modernist' tradition of writing in which, in a similar mode to Kristeva's definition of abjection, the present is rendered 'unwanted, inadequate, *abject*' (Powers 188).

The notion of writing itself as abject in its close relation with death may also be viewed as a peculiarly Modernist phenomenon in its concern with pollution and the wasted past. In its usurping of convention and aims of shocking the dominant bourgeois culture, Modernism questions the motivation of the abject behind *all* writing; a point raised by Kristeva in her speculation as to whether one writes

under any other condition than being possessed by abjection, in an indefinite catharsis? [...] none will accuse of being a usurper the artist



who, even if he does not know it, is an undoer of narcissism and of all imaginary identity as well (ibid).

The literary treatment of death in the Modernist short story thus entails a relationship between the body and the 'body writing', a confrontation with otherness, and the experience of abjection. All are closely associated with death as the ultimate state of liminality, indicating Victor Turner's contention that 'liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the social norm' ('Liminal' 46). The Modernist preoccupation with death exposes how, as Eagleton has noted, 'to see something for real is to celebrate the felicitous accident of its existence' (210). The Modernist use of the death trope as a metaphor for writing is indicative of the inexorable connection between death, writing, and liminality. As Foucault points out, our culture has metamorphosed the idea of writing as 'something designed to ward off death', and yet 'the work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right [...] to be its author's murderer' ('What is an Author?' 141). Moreover, because the short story form exemplifies liminality, it has been marginalised, yet as Valerie Shaw notes, it is a fertile ground for freedom of literary experimentation, ironically precisely because it has traditionally been critically sidelined. The written text, particularly in the marginalised genre of the short story, embodies the characteristic annihilating and liberating duality of the liminal.

The liminal double-bind is thus an intrinsic feature of the literary text, a characteristic which is acknowledged and playfully exploited in the connection drawn between the body and the 'body writing' in the Modernist short story. In its liberating potential, the approach to death in the Modernist short story also exemplifies Derrida's view that the privileging of speech over writing, owing to the former's connotations with proximity, presence and life, illustrates a false opposition. For Derrida, writing is characterised by the familiar liminal double-

bind. His metaphor for writing, the *pharmakon*, simultaneously meaning 'remedy' and 'poison', displaces and usurps speech.<sup>14</sup> Writing is liminal: a benevolent yet deadly 'supplement' that is both toxic and curative, displacing yet enabling. Writing symbolises absence, and yet, in a final manifestation of the potentially restrictive and enabling liminal paradox, *not* writing entails death, as without it memory and the literary artefact cannot survive.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Significantly, Kemp's article focuses mainly on short fiction relating to this theme with a particular focus on stories by Richardson and Sinclair.

<sup>2</sup> In "What is an Author?," Foucault responds to criticisms of his previous book, *The Order of Things*, in which he interrogated the criteria under which human beings become the objects of knowledge. Critics had challenged this text for the way in which Foucault defined Buffon, a French 18th century writer, and Charles Darwin, a British 19th century writer, as belonging to the same discursive field of knowledge. Foucault's response to a quotation from Beckett: 'What matter who is speaking?' is repeated by Barthes in relation to a quotation from Balzac: 'who is speaking thus?' ('Death' 185). Barthes suggests the answer is impossible to determine as writing is 'the deconstruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (ibid).

<sup>3</sup> 'The Pin-Prick' makes overt references to the notion of the artefact as symbolically 'dead', a notion Sinclair reiterates in her story 'The Wrackham Memoirs', in which a young journalist edits the memoirs of a recently dead author, and in doing so extinguishes him.

<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that Woolf's story 'Kew Gardens' makes an explicit connection between 'gross and heavy' bodies and the grotesque, thick waxen bodies of candles. Thus the candle comes to symbolise the wider-scale death and destruction surrounding a story set in the context of war (see Chapter 3 page 103). Likewise, Sinclair's sulphur candle is characterised by the overt imagery of violence and death.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault has claimed that a close relationship exists between writing and death as 'the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular identity [...] reduced to noting more than the singularity of his absence he must assume the role of the dead man in the genre of writing' ('What is an Author?' 142).

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1, 33-36.

<sup>7</sup> It is significant that what makes the concept of a literary canon possible is death. In its religious context, canonising is the formal recognition of sainthood by a religious body. Taking place only after death, canonisation ensures immortality and a place in the afterlife. In a literary sense, the 'immortalising' of major authors implies the canon is a static entity assuming, as Jan Gorak points out in *The Making of the Modern Canon*, that, once included in the canon, the 'major' texts inhabiting it are frozen within it. Other, less recognised texts remain excluded (Gorak 1).

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 5 deals with the Modernist tension between random and ordered worlds through the literary device of the epiphany.

<sup>9</sup> Woodward's notion of a memoriam as usurper of physical presence is translated by Derrida as a liminal entity, a 'supplement' or *Pharmakon* which is simultaneously deadly and beneficent, wielding its powers 'over death but also in cahoots with it' ('Pharmacy' 131-2). The *pharmakon*, simultaneously meaning remedy and poison, 'separates not only speech from writing but also memory as an unveiling (re-)producing a presence from re-memoration' ('Pharmacy' 133).

<sup>10</sup> See Douglas, Turner and Van Gennepe.



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<sup>11</sup> Bronfen has noted that 'Notions of "good death" were introduced into the Christian culture to suggest that the moment of death be seen as the correct fulfillment of and so a judgement on a person's life' (*Over Her Dead Body* 77-8).

<sup>12</sup> Winnicott develops Klein's 'object relations' theory of the child's development in engaging with a world beyond the self as discussed in Chapter 2. He develops her notion of the depressive position into the notion of an 'intermediate area' of experience that an infant creates in order to cope with the pain of separation. Helping to effect the necessary separation from the mother and the differentiation between self and world are "transitional objects", which are perceived as I and Not-I at the same time, and which function to permit a transition into "reality".

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 4 examines the status of language as an entity between the ordered and random worlds, and between the unconscious and spoken discourse.

<sup>14</sup> The notion of the doubling of language as its inherent condition, and the relationship of language to death, is theorised by Derrida in his essay 'Plato's Pharmacy', in which he introduces the idea of writing as a supplement. Derrida draws on Plato's *pharmakon*, simultaneously meaning remedy and poison, as a metaphor for writing. In this analysis, writing is what Derrida calls a supplement to speech. This term is a typical play on words by Derrida, embodying the dual characteristics of remedy and danger, and is used as a tool for deconstructing the binary opposition between speech and writing.



## Conclusion: The Liminal Paradox

The short stories discussed throughout the preceding chapters convey a consistent struggle to articulate meaning and a sense of self. Liminality is portrayed in these stories as comprising many moments or interludes of vision. These are less revelations of an order of 'some real thing behind appearances' (*MB* 72), as Woolf put it, than instances in which the reader and protagonists become aware of conflicts which cannot be resolved, arising from situations that are resistant to rational analysis. Modernist short fiction consistently strives to represent a state that is tangible yet elusive, and can therefore only hint at the realm of the liminal that always remains out of reach, silent and incommunicable. For Mansfield, Richardson, Sinclair and Woolf, the short story offered an experimental canvas on which they endeavoured to articulate meaning, to represent the borders of unconsciousness, and to convey a sense of the 'unsayable'.

Through their concern with the liminal, these writers contribute significantly to the Modernist aesthetic which interrogates identity, the construction of the self, and the relationship between the individual and society. In the Modernist short story, liminality embodies the characteristics of outsiderdom, exile and marginalisation, encompassing such states as psychosis, disease and death. Life, mortality, mourning, adolescence, old age, language and subjectivity are also connected through a subtle inter-relationship with liminality, which offers glimpses of apparently inaccessible realms.

A brief résumé of Van Gennep's and Turner's definitions of liminality as a 'transition between' also serves as a reminder that liminality, and the conditions of life it symbolises, is always transitional. The transition between is a universal phenomenon, involving the transgression of boundaries between cultures and societies throughout history, and is thus an important aspect of social and

subjective existence. As Victor Turner has pointed out, 'different sets of human beings in time and space are similar and different in their cultural manifestations' (*Ritual to Theatre* 8). However, anthropologists are generally agreed that what different cultures and societies do have in common is the pattern of the rite of passage (Turner, *Pilgrimage* 2; Van Gennep 191), in which the *limen* or transitional phase is pivotal.

As Van Gennep suggests, within this schema the individual 'must submit, from the day of his birth to that of his death, to ceremonies whose forms often vary but whose function is similar' (Van Gennep 189). This function is the marking of a passage from one category, state or place of being to another, depicted in the Modernist short story as a transcending of boundaries that are psychological as well as social, and thematic as well as theoretical. The ideas of Van Gennep and Turner may be further illuminated by theories focusing on liminal states, most notably those drawn from psychoanalysis but also from sociology and poststructuralist theory. Comprising most notably the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, these theories interrogate the complex interrelationships between social contingency, subjectivity, the preconscious, and language.<sup>1</sup> All focus on the connections between liminality, language and signification and all question what, as Kelly Oliver puts it, 'might get lost' in the translation from lived experience to its linguistic articulation (Oliver xii). These theories, like the Modernist short story, interrogate what Woolf calls the 'white spaces between hour and hour' (*TW* 156) which both exist and yet, paradoxically, cannot exist in any tangible form.

In a study entitled *Modernity and Ambivalence*, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman theorises the tension between ordered and contingent worlds in terms of culture, with language as a barrier between. Likewise, Julia Kristeva posits language between a semiotic realm of drives and the structured grammar of the Symbolic through which subjectivity is articulated. Each of these theories

implies that language itself is a liminal entity. This is a potentially revealing approach in the context of a consideration of the short story as an experimental form through which Modernist writers negotiate the struggle to make language articulate 'meaning'. The protagonists they depict attempt to realise, in particular, the meaning behind moments or interludes of vision.

The Modernist short story typically depicts moments of revelation in which the possibilities for a protagonist's subjectivity may be recognised but not realised. The physical state of being in transit is often used as a metaphor for these interludes, a point noted by the novelist and short-story writer Elizabeth Bowen, whose own characters are 'almost perpetually in transit' (*Pictures and Conversations* 41). As Bowen goes on to explain, when her characters 'invade the unknown, travel, what goes on in them is magnified and enhanced: impacts are sharper, there is more objectivity' (ibid 41-42).

Bowen's observation that 'sharper impacts' are achieved through states of transition suggests a different, more momentary and fleeting, approach to the liminal state condition of being 'in transit' from those adopted in weighty epic novels like *Pilgrimage* and *Ulysses*. By contrast, the Modernist short story is typically concerned with depicting fleeting interludes or moments. Moreover, through its intrinsic brevity the short story form conveys effectively the sense of being suspended, often stopping abruptly after a few brief pages.

In the Modernist short story, revelatory moments experienced in transitions between rooms or across thresholds, or during interludes such as short twilight walks, or a journey to a holiday destination, are freighted with significance. This is discernible in Richardson's 'Tryst', in which a transitory moment of freedom enables the protagonist to imagine an identity that is distinct from her domestic role. The woman's brief foray into a space between her internal and external lives offers a moment of freedom, resulting in her discovery of an 'elastically expanded' sense of being (*JP* 59). This apparently ordinary



interlude results in a shift in the protagonist's subjectivity. Ultimately, the woman returns home and discards her newly discovered sense of self. However, the story concludes on the threshold, and the re-opening of the door and sound of the owl outside suggest that her inner life and the interspace between her two subjective senses of self is still accessible, if only fleetingly.

In 'Tryst', the space between the interior and 'outside' of the woman's consciousness is balanced by the opposition between nature and culture, which is symbolised by the seashore and the interior of the house. Positioned between these two worlds is language. It is uncoincidental that it is through the act of speaking that the 'Tryst' protagonist feels 'with the sounding of her own voice, the door of her inward life close' (*JP* 60). The story thus anticipates Bauman's later theory of language as an entity between 'a solidly founded, orderly world fit for human habitation, and a contingent world of randomness' (1). In its liminal position between the two, language represents the tool through which, as Bauman puts it, 'order is continually engaged in the war of survival. The other of order is the uncertainty, that source and archetype of all fear' (7).

This tension between order and other is demonstrated in Modernist short stories such as 'Journey to Paradise', 'Death', 'The Voyage', and 'An Unwritten Novel', through the pervasive images of stations, hospitals, holiday homes, gardens and railway carriages: transient spaces that are occupied only fleetingly. By stark contrast, the condition of being literally 'stationary', catatonic or paralysed entails an occasional recognition on the part of the characters in these stories that they are confronting their own mortality. To be 'stationary' literally entails stasis, evoking a fear of being suspended within a permanent purgatory, as occurs in the waiting room that terrifies the protagonist in 'Journey to Paradise'.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, Bauman as well as Richardson uses the station as a metaphor for stasis. For Bauman, modernity is 'a journey without end' and

thus any place of arrival may only ever be a 'temporary station' (10-11). The station, Richardson's metaphor for the unknown country in 'Journey to Paradise', is reminiscent of a terror of stasis, immobility and death.

Bauman's 'war of survival' between order and other is thus palpable in the Modernist short story; played out in the characters' implicit difficulties in making language speak for them. Significantly, it is with the sound of her own voice that the 'Tryst' protagonist is compelled to discard the possibilities for her subjectivity that she has glimpsed. Yet language is our sole recourse to being, and without it, it is impossible to possess or articulate a sense of self.

This irreconcilable dilemma lies at the heart of the liminal condition. It illustrates the close affinity between liminality and the Modernists' attempts to subvert the limits of language by striving continually to push beyond them and reveal new possibilities for social and subjective consciousness. As the situation of the 'Tryst' protagonist illustrates, the liminal experience frequently entails a push towards subjectivity; it strains against the current status of the characters but cannot move beyond it. The drive to communicate is nevertheless a desire to 'make' for language somehow to catch hold of this unarticulated drive and translate it into intelligible experience.

An insight into liminal states which are apparently unrealisable through language may be found in the work of Julia Kristeva. Her account of the semiotic and Symbolic, in which she sets out the object of theorising the signifying process 'vis-à-vis general theories of meaning, theories of language, and theories of the subject' ('Revolution' 90), is a further useful tool for examining the implicit liminality of language that these stories suggest.

Kristeva's theory of signification combines psychoanalytic theory and linguistics, frequently Saussure's account of the play of signifiers and Lacan's account of the entry of the subject into language. Following Lacan, Kristeva postulates the theory that subjectivity is formed through the entry of the subject

into language. The symbolic element of language is, as Kelly Oliver phrases it, 'the structure or grammar that governs the ways in which symbols can refer' (Oliver xiv). The semiotic, by contrast, is the organisation of drives in language. In a rewriting of Lacanian theory of the 'Imaginary', Kristeva maintains that the semiotic is a residue of the pre-oedipal state of pleasure and sustenance, derived from the maternal body, which exists before the subject's entry into language. Whilst the semiotic is 'outside' the Symbolic element of signification, the two are mutually dependent, existing in a dialectical oscillation. The semiotic element may, however, be reactivated through poetic language, which Kristeva identifies in particular in literary texts of the avant-garde. Through what she describes as 'poetic "distortions" of the signifying chain' ('Revolution' 103), these texts 'manage to cover the infinity of the [signifying] process, that is, reach the semiotic' (ibid 122).<sup>3</sup> The 'semiotic' realm of signification appears to be reactivated in the Modernist short story when a moment of revelation is invoked, however briefly, and yet fails to reveal anything other than irreconcilable conflicts, most notably in the instances in which language appears to 'fail' the protagonists.

In Mansfield's writing in particular, a characteristic breakdown in syntax occurs whenever such moments occur; a quality also discernible in Joyce's work.<sup>4</sup> In 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', for instance, the two sisters find it impossible to make language speak their experiences. They cannot articulate what it is they need to say and move forward from their liminal position of mourning. Constantia is able to say merely that her Buddha knew 'something you don't know', and can only hint vaguely at a world behind appearances, a 'something', she is sure exists elsewhere (CS 282). Josephine is unable to articulate her sexuality, and recognises neither the source of her own crying, which she associates with birds chirping outside her window, nor the self she could have been had her independence not been thwarted by the demands of



her tyrannical father. Both sisters briefly experience an interlude of mourning for the selves they could have been, and a fleeting, barely acknowledged envisioning of their own sexuality. However, they 'forget' what it is they wanted to say when they try to communicate these experiences. Language fails them, or, as Eliot put it, they find it 'impossible to say just what I mean!' (*Selected Poems* 15), and to make language speak their experiences.

In its concern with 'the places where self-identity is threatened, the limits of language' (Oliver xvi), Modernist short stories reveal a marked affinity with the later theories of Kristeva. Significantly, Kristeva's interest focuses not only on how subjectivity is constituted through language acquisition, but also in how subjectivity is simultaneously demolished with the psychotic breakdown of language (ibid). The effects of this are palpable in stories such as 'Tryst' and 'Daughters of the Late Colonel', which appear to strain against the limits of language. Yet there is an implied recognition of the potentially devastating impact of liminality in Mansfield's resistance to the experimental, 'feminine' prose at the centre of contemporary debates surrounding the stream of consciousness narrative.<sup>5</sup> Mansfield's stance on this issue accords with Judith Butler's later claim that it is necessary to think of the symbolic as the temporal dynamics of regulatory discourse, not a quasi-permanent structure (*Bodies that Matter* 22). Butler's challenge to Kristeva's notion of the maternal body as a pre-discursive construct thus repositions it as an *effect* of culture, rather than its 'secret and primary cause', (*Gender Trouble* 80). This in turn enables 'a critical rethinking of the "feminine" in relation to discourse and the category of the real' (*Bodies that Matter* 189).

Mansfield's stories appear to pre-empt this theory. What Clare Hanson refers to as Mansfield's 'determined holding on to a position of control and authority in language' (303) recognises that a reclaiming of the 'outside' potentially leads to a loss of political power for women. This issue is addressed

in Mansfield's short stories, particularly in her depictions of the liminal status of her women characters and in her interrogation of the 'space between' in which future potential subject positions may be recognised. This is perhaps illustrated most clearly in the figure of Beryl Fairfield in Mansfield's 'Burnell' stories. Beryl recognises her multiple identity and simultaneously resists and desires the roles society offers her. She is, however, unable ultimately to transcend these roles and is thus trapped in a liminal space between conflicting subject positions.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Mansfield suggests that the glimpse of recognition afforded by the liminal can be equivocal. This is illustrated in Bertha Young's unanswered despairing question in 'Bliss': 'what is going to happen now?' (CS 205), against which the background of the flowering pear tree in the garden remains unchanged, yet is somehow charged with potential.

In Mansfield's stories, liminal experiences are frequently also encounters with characters' mortality, occurring in a fleeting moment that changes the protagonists it touches in a subtle but permanent way. Having undergone a rite of passage, whether metaphorically or physically, a residue of the liminal remains. Once glimpsed, a shift occurs in the subjectivity of the protagonists, albeit often a subtle one. Even though they glimpse potential which may not be realised, characters can still return to their lives *where* they were. They cannot, however, return as they were. In Kristeva's theory, the semiotic constitutes a residue of the Symbolic world of signification, and likewise, in Mansfield's stories a residue of liminality similarly pushes against and subverts 'meaning', whilst not necessarily resolving the conflicts it reveals.

These liminal states have a number of discernible effects. In challenging the limits of language they appear to hint towards a realisation of freedom, individual and social change, and a renewed sense of self. However, they also encapsulate a restrictive, negative double bind, threatening death, marginality and psychosis. Even in cases where liminality is encountered in the transient,

ephemeral and fleeting moments that are a marked feature of the Modernist short story, these temporary inversions of social roles do not offer lasting change. Liminal experience makes it possible to envisage a space of subjective and cultural possibility, but not to inhabit it.

Despite this, however, positive liminal attributes are discernible in the work of these four writers. Their stories consist of more than a mere articulation of women's socially marginalised roles, or a rebellion against the 'law' of patriarchal hegemony. Both Van Gennep and Turner insist that liminality refers to 'transition between' as opposed to marginalisation. Although the stories are frequently concerned with articulating the subjectivities of women, something links the characters in these stories aside from their gender. In their focus on the liminal and their gesturing towards a contingent world of possible identities and cultural possibilities, their authors appear to address some essential questions later raised by Judith Butler:

How might the excluded return, not as psychosis or the figure of the psychotic within politics, but as that which has been rendered mute, foreclosed from the domain of political signification? How and where is social content attributed to the site of the "real", and then positioned as the unspeakable? (*Bodies that Matter* 189).

These questions are addressed in the Modernist short story through the various modes of attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to articulate 'being'. They also, however, address the question of *not* articulating, of adopting a position of silence and outsiderdom as a mode of cultural and political subversion. The question of an 'outside' is given serious attention by Woolf, Sinclair and Mansfield in their interrogation of the social status of the outsider in war. Woolf appears to embrace this stance positively, whilst Mansfield's attitude is sceptical



in spite of the connection she makes between domestic and state sanctioned tyranny, which is similar to the stance taken by Woolf in *Three Guineas*.<sup>7</sup> For Sinclair, as her story 'Red Tape' and her 'Journal of Impressions in Belgium' suggest, superfluity and outsiderdom in states of war are entirely negative.

Passive modes of resisting violence are ultimately problematic, as is demonstrated in the stories of all three writers, in which a position of silence is adopted for varying reasons but, on each occasion, is equally ineffective. To stay silent, to accept a position that is culturally or linguistically 'outside' and to opt out of society is to be disempowered, to risk marginalisation. This view coincides with Butler's suggestion that there cannot be an absolute 'outside' from which the boundaries of discourse can be exceeded or countered (*Bodies that Matter* 8). To speak is to reiterate established social roles and subjective identities, yet Butler maintains that language is absolutely necessary as our sole means of articulating 'being'.

Language may again be viewed here as a site of liminality standing between random and ordered worlds, and embodying the annihilating and restrictive paradox of the space between. Mansfield and Sinclair ultimately eschew Woolf's adoption of the 'society of outsiders' position, a position which conceivably informs Mansfield's rejection of a radically experimental, 'feminine' prose. Mansfield's stories, and even Sinclair's somewhat negative portrayals of superfluity, are ultimately empowering in their implicit recognition that any attempt to embrace the 'absolute outside' is, as Butler suggests, neither possible nor desirable. It is important to note, moreover, that even Woolf's microcosm of the society of outsiders, in spite of its subversive potential, ultimately re-aggregates into the macrocosm of society.

A failure of the re-aggregation process following the three-phase rite of passage further reveals the destructive potential of an unrealisable, inaccessible 'outside' to discourse and a further liminal site in the conflict war between order

and other. This occurs commonly in the rites of mourning, a liminal condition theorised extensively by Van Gennep. Psychoanalysis defines blocked mourning as the 'encryptment' of a lost other within the psyche; the crypt being a metaphor for the process through which, as Derrida describes it, 'the ego contains and metaphorically "keeps alive" the corpus/text, a body of words, as well as the cadaver of the other' ('Foreword' to *Magic Word* xv).

Katherine Mansfield's story 'The Fly' depicts an instance of *limen*, the re-aggregation phase of the ritual of passage, which remains incomplete. The story centres upon a figure known simply as 'the boss', who attempts to reassert his subjectivity following the death of his son. His efforts to identify himself focus on the objects in his newly refurbished office, as well as his later exertion of power over the fly which drowns in his inkpot. The only symbol of the boss's former identity as a father is six-year old photograph of his son, who has died in combat.

The boss's attempts to reassert his own identity are complex and ambiguous. The multi-faceted identity 'the boss' is emblematic of society and corporate power, as well as the subjective role of a bereaved father. Having relinquished the subject position of father, there is no new subject position to supersede it. This liminal position is also occupied by Mansfield's character Ma Parker, an impoverished worker who has been a mother and grandmother to numerous dead children. After sustaining these losses, Ma's story ends bleakly. 'There was nowhere' (CS 309) for her to go to mourn, as her time is governed by the need to earn a living. Ma thus has no further subject positions to occupy as a mother or grandmother, merely as a drudge.

A moment of vision occurs in 'The Fly' at the moment when Woodfield's mention of the war graves wrests open the literal crypt of the son, together with the metaphorical crypt of his father. The events that follow reveal a fictional re-enactment of the encrypted liminal condition of blocked or 'impossible'



mourning, a state in which re-aggregation rites into society remain uncompleted, and so mourning is blocked or disrupted. The crypt serves to keep alive the cadaver of the other in the form of a body of 'words buried alive' (Derrida, 'Foreword' to *Magic Word* xxxv-xxxvi). This initiates a cycle of violence that is kept alive by the preservation of the crypt, which is, as Derrida points out, built by violence (ibid xv). In 'The Fly', the cycle of violence is delivered at the hands of an anonymous entity, the boss, against a helpless insect, thus suggesting a wider context of war mourning than the grieving of one father over his son. In the scene with the inkpot, the cycle of violence inflicted on the war dead is metaphorically re-enacted on the fly. The catalyst is the 'opening' of the crypt by Woodifield, and yet after the cycle of uncompleted mourning occurs, the crypt is once more metaphorically 'buried'. Significantly, the denouement of 'Daughters of the Late Colonel' – another story of mourning – focuses on the sisters' inability to remember what it was they wanted to say. Similarly, following a sudden 'grinding feeling of wretchedness' after the insect's death in 'The Fly', the boss is unable to recollect what he was thinking about before.

The depiction of encrypted states in 'The Fly' thus reveals once more the irreconcilable conflicts often manifesting in the liminal condition. The notion that for the Boss and Ma Parker, as well as characters like Miss Brill, 'there was nowhere' to move to once the liminal condition has been negotiated, their failure of re-aggregation entails a psychic encryptment, a form of mourning in various guises for the protagonists' selves and their lost others. The relationship between liminality, language and subjectivity is again called into question, designating the problem identified by Derrida as to how discourse may come to include 'that which, being the very condition of discourse, would be its very essence *escape* discourse?' (Derrida, 'Foreword' to *Magic Word* xxxii).

This complex problem of articulating an 'elsewhere' beyond language, a site of liminality which is elusive and incommunicable, is also addressed by



Derrida in his work on deconstruction. Insisting that deconstruction is not 'a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language', Derrida suggests that rather, it is 'deeply concerned with the 'other' of language' (*Dialogues* 123 qtd Oliver xix). Derrida's theories thus demonstrate the contention that language itself embodies the attributes of a 'lack', standing in for what is absent, yet this other – death being its most extreme example - is impossible to articulate. Yet writing about death is empowering, as shown by May Sinclair's character Roly Simpson telling the story of his dead 'subject', May Blissett, in 'The Pin-Prick'. May's identity is ironically asserted by her act of self-annihilation, but her story is ultimately conveyed by Simpson, literally over her dead body. Death may only be written of through the total disempowerment imposed by the death of another. Modernist short stories focusing on death thus attempt to capture the moment of transition from articulate, speaking subject to inanimate object, from being to non being; a moment which is, by its very nature, unknowable.

Likewise, Dorothy Richardson's portrayals of death in her short fiction demonstrate it as a liminal, unknowable quality that cannot be articulated in language as a subjective experience. However, Richardson frequently depicts this as a liberating state. Her story 'Death' in particular accords with Foucault's later contention that death is merely a discourse forming part of a history of ideas, but has the liberating quality of being 'the ultimate compensator for differences of class, fate and fortune' (171). The narrator of Richardson's 'Death' expresses similar sentiments in her assertion that death renders everyone equal: 'they're all in for it, rich and poor alike' (*JP* 105). Death thus exposes most starkly liminality's potential for liberation and annihilation, a state inherent in a condition that marks the unequivocal transition from presence to absence; from known to unknown. Yet, as the switch from the first to the third-person narrative at the denouement of Richardson's story indicates, it is

impossible to articulate this form of unknowable experience linguistically. Whilst, as Terry Eagleton suggests, the condition of non-being is at the centre of being, it is possible only to articulate the death of an other, even though, paradoxically, that other is always already a residual aspect of identity.

The work of theorists such as Kristeva, Derrida and Butler is thus illuminating in the context of a connection between the Modernist short story, language and liminality. Their work draws continual attention to the struggle to articulate this 'other' of language, which both Butler and Derrida are at pains to make clear is impossible. As Kelly Oliver points out, 'words can do no more than point to, or to conjure, the absence of that about which they speak. That about which they speak – life, love, the material world, even language itself – is other to words' (Oliver xx). The other of language is its antithesis, even if the presence of this unarticulated 'other' is what ultimately gives language its meaning.

The Modernist short story is concerned constantly with this tension within language and draws attention to the realm of the not-said; a contingent world of possibility which reveals itself in momentary glimpses of uninhabitable domains and dilemmas which by their nature, lack solutions. Depictions of liminality in the Modernist short story intersect. Thresholds, death, silence, marginalisation, alienation and madness are negative aspects of a state that ultimately bears within itself the potential for social and political change, the formation of new subject positions and the erosion of previously established social conventions. The exploitation of transition and the space between in the short fiction of Mansfield, Sinclair, Richardson and Woolf enables the subversion and resistance offered by the in-between spaces of the liminal. The relationship between these stories and the liminal entities they embrace is ambivalent, and is centred on a paradox. Liminality shapes and restricts identity, but it also gives us the means by which to speak as a subject. Without language, without the

liminal, even without death - the ultimately subsuming and annihilating capacity of liminality - subjectivity cannot *be*.

Liminality is, therefore, an ambiguous and ambivalent state and its prevalence in the Modernist short story is borne of a creative yet destructive paradox. Any engagement with the liminal necessarily entails a struggle against ambivalence; a struggle which is, as Bauman phrases it, 'both self-destructive and self-propelling' (Bauman 3). Liminality enables life, and yet, in its ultimate manifestation of death, will eventually extinguish identity. Thus liminality, mortality, life and death are inextricably interconnected and mutually interdependent. The Modernist short story frequently exploits this tension through a focus on the ambivalent, paradoxical states associated with liminality. In its simultaneous capacity for inclusion and exclusion, liminality is both subversive and restrictive, being, as Turner puts it,

no longer the positive past condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition. It seems, too, to be passive since it is dependent on the articulated, positive conditions it mediates. Yet on probing one finds in liminality both positive and active qualities [...] Liminality is a temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order (*Ritual* 41).

As a moment of transition, liminality is, therefore, an uncomfortable state between what Turner calls 'successive conservatively secure states of being, cognition, or status-role incumbency' (Turner, *Pilgrimage* 2). These states occur whenever boundaries are crossed, whether fictional, cultural, social, political or psychological, and apply to all phases of decisive cultural change.

The short story reveals an intrinsic connection with liminal entities in all their ambiguity and complexity. Indeed, the liminal paradox is an intrinsic



characteristic of the Modernist short story itself. There is general critical agreement that the short story is distinct from both poetry and prose as a literary genre.<sup>8</sup> Yet in its typical crossing of fictional boundaries, the Modernist short story resists both interpretation and any universal definition. Occasionally barely distinguishable from the sketch or essay, the stories discussed throughout this thesis typically adopt an impressionistic style forming a hybrid of poetry and prose. Katherine Mansfield makes this distinction in her *Journal* in 1916, referring to the short story as a prose style 'trembling on the brink of poetry' (*JKM* 44) and stating her aim of compiling a story 'perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose. Almost certainly in a kind of *special prose*' (ibid). The Modernist short story thus transcends genre boundaries, and is posited on the cusp *between* poetry and prose. Moreover, the brevity of the form heightens the sense of being suspended which is often captured in short fiction. The implications of working with the short story form are thus twofold, involving an acceptance on the part of the storyteller of its limitations, yet, as Valerie Shaw points out, also enabling the writer to make its freedom 'an aspect of those same restrictions' (264).

A response to such a paradoxical entity might be to question how something so potentially restrictive could simultaneously be positive and liberating. The Modernist short story provides an answer in itself. Its focus on transition and the space between enables a challenge to social and cultural modes of thought and behaviour. It questions the limits of subjectivity, it exploits and deconstructs the tension between established dichotomies, and it also shows how, as Turner puts it, 'hitherto unprecedented modes of ordering relations between ideas and people [become] possible and desirable' (ibid).

It is this constant concern with transition and the space between which arguably signifies the experimental potentiality that gave Woolf the 'sense of freedom' she claimed to find in her short-story writing ('The Russian Point of

View' 225), or the feeling of liberation Mansfield found in her stories: 'a shaking free' (Alpers 121). This creative potential is ultimately made possible through the liminal entities that pervade the form, context and content of the Modernist short story.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Derrida's introduction to Abraham and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, and Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

<sup>2</sup> Apathy and stasis characterise Joyce's short stories in *Dubliners*, particularly the last story in the volume entitled 'Death'.

<sup>3</sup> These incursions into the semiotic realm of language are also associated with the 'feminine prose' identified by Woolf as discussed in Chapter 3. Kristeva claims, however, that 'feminine' prose may also bear a male signature which, whilst it 'rescues' her theory from the essentialism inherent in the work of theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, is also somewhat self-defeating. Full discussions of Kristeva's theories of the semiotic and Symbolic elements of language may be found in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed Kelly Oliver, and *The Kristeva Reader*, ed Toril Moi.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5 page 167.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4 page 146.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4 pages 137-140.

<sup>7</sup> See Mansfield's representations of war and violence in her stories 'Germans at Meat' and 'The Swing of the Pendulum', discussed in Chapter 3 pages 86-89.

<sup>8</sup> Theorists such as Edgar Allan Poe, Brander Matthews and B M Ejexenbaum have argued that the short story is distinguishable from the novel by, amongst other factors, the unity of impression its brevity necessarily demands. See pages 14-15.

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